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THE BEER IN REVIEW
The Best Beer & Breweries of 2024

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TOP-RATED
BEERS
of 2024

THE TOP
3 BREWERIES
of 2024

TRENDING
BEER STYLES
FOR 2025
Czech Lager, German Helles
Exportbier, Schwarzbier
and more!

#1
Rated Beer
of 2024
"Yes. Life's good here."

THE STATE
OF CRAFT
The beer industry
grapples with changing
consumer tastes.



WINTER 2025
ISSUE #76 • JANUARY / FEBRUARY

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New Year




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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Happy holidays and welcome to our annual, year-end edition of *The Beer Connoisseur*® magazine! This issue, once again, represents the year that was in craft beer as well as a look ahead to what 2025 might bring.

2024 was an intriguing year for beer fans, especially those that were looking to experience the social aspect of drinking or keep up their grueling exercise routine while still enjoying a lovely beer. To that end, non-alcoholic beer experienced a meteoric rise, which started a few years ago and has continued unabated.

While hard seltzers have seemed to fade away from the public consciousness – and also store shelves – in its place, NA beers of all stripes, be they from small craft breweries or mega, global brewing conglomerates, have risen the charts with extreme speed.

And that's understandable! Brewers are the best they've ever been, and producing an ultra-flavorful, true-to-style non-alcoholic brew is seemingly trivial for them. As such, the sales – and demand – for such products has never been higher.

Beyond the continued rise of NA beer, which is covered extensively both in our Consumer Trends piece as well as a new story in 2024 entitled "The State of Craft," our Beer in Review section, as always, outlines the best beers and breweries from the year that was – and 2024 was a boozy doozy.

Matching the highest number of World Class beers in our history, our judges reviewed an incredible 14 beers that scored above a 96 in 2024. While the "downfall of craft beer" continues to be a hot topic in the industry, our Official Review saw no such downturn, as brewers continued to deliver top-tier beers on a regular basis to our judges throughout the year.

For the second year running, our Brewery of the Year submitted three beers that achieved World Class ratings, including one of two beers that achieved a rating of 98. The brewery showcased their brewing mastery by producing three distinct beers that are exemplars of their style – read on to find out what storied brewery I'm referring to!

Either way, you're a winner, dear reader. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for joining us on this beer journey, and we hope that your holidays are merry and bright. We wish you and your family all the best in 2025, and here's to you in the new year and beyond!



Chris Guest
Managing Editor

The Beer Connoisseur® MAGAZINE

THE BEER IN REVIEW

WINTER 2025

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ABOUT THE OFFICIAL REVIEW

The Official Review is conducted in a single-blind tasting format that adheres to the Beer Judge Certification Program 2021 Style Guidelines. This method provides the best opportunity to rely on facts and to avoid favoritism, ensuring a level playing field for all brewers. It serves both the industry and the consumer to have unbiased and objective scores from qualified experts.

In an effort to provide the most credible evaluations, The Beer Connoisseur hand-selects judges with a minimum BJCP ranking of "National" or Master Cicerone®. Judges are required to work with an assistant that handles beer prior to evaluation, and breweries are not allowed to solicit judges directly.

In the single-blind tasting format, judges are presented with a chilled, properly poured beer and given its style category. Scoring is then done on the following basis using a 100-point scale: Aroma (24 points), Appearance (6 points), Flavor (40 points), Mouthfeel (10 points) and Overall Impression (20 points).

The score breakdown is as follows:

- 100 to 96: World Class – You need this beer in your life.
- 95 to 91: Exceptional – Don't hesitate.
- 90 to 86: Very Good – A brew to savor.
- 85 to 75: Average – Somewhat unimpressive.
- 74 and below: Not Recommended – Just walk away.

THE BEST BEER & BREWERIES AWARDS

Each year in December, we tally the year's highest-scoring beers, ciders and meads evaluated in the Official Review and combine them into a list of the finest examples. We publish this list in the January magazine edition called "The Beer in Review."

This annual edition features the top-rated 100 beers of the year with judge's notes, as well as feature-length stories on the World Class-rated beers with Brewer Q&As, judge's second opinions and full-color photographs of the beer and brewer to showcase these outstanding brews. We then award the 3 breweries that received the collective highest-scoring beers of the year.

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Read each judge's full body of reviews online at: <https://BeerConnoisseur.com/Judges>

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Tualatin, OR



John C. Tull, Master

Judges are certified through the Beer Judge Certification Program (BJCP) or have achieved the level of Master Cicerone® with the Cicerone® Certification Program.

STORY BY: JIM DYKSTRA

There's a sense of foreboding in the world of beer that the dream is deferred, if not dead, and that the Roaring Teens and Twenties are giving way to a Duff Bowl. Manifest destiny has reached the far shore, and craft beer is no longer booming.

While the craft beer world is right to pause and reckon with its changing landscape, it's important to see just how far things have come. In 2014, craft contributed about \$20 billion to the U.S. economy, per the Brewers Association.

In 2023, that number had ballooned to just over \$77 billion. Furthermore, the industry also contributed "nearly 460,000 total jobs, with almost 190,000 jobs directly at breweries and brewpubs, including serving staff at brewpubs."

We're not seeing moonshot growth, but we're seeing a mature, stable market firmly entrenched in modern American culture. If you want a job in the beer industry, you're probably going to be able to find one, provided you work harder than you drink.

As is true in many arenas of life, a little gratitude can go a long way in lifting us from a collective fugue state and bringing our minds back to the baseline. So too can a reminder that hard seltzer, imports and macro brews all play a part in our beer ecosystem, bringing in new potential drinkers and opening up minds and palates to new flavors and new interpersonal connection.

So, have heart as we look at the numbers. They're a snapshot of a living, thriving world of beer. It may lack the fire of young love, but the embers of our favorite beer category burn bright. Grab a winter warmer and join us for a dive into 2025 as we swirl the dregs of the past year.

CRAFT BY STYLE

On paper, it was not the greatest year for craft beer sales. In fact, they were down by 3.3 percent. Retail channels are closing as high-ABV, expensive craft sits on shelves in the face of an economic downturn. If it doesn't turn over quickly, it won't last in a world dictated by spreadsheets. Plus, craft is not always shelf stable or around long enough to build brand identity. There is pressure from both retail and consumer sides for lighter beer. We'll find out later if the numbers have begun to reflect that pressure.

Among the Craft segment's top five biggest sellers, IPA, the golden goose, saw growth, topping out at \$914 million dollar sales and accounting for just about half of all craft sales. The next three – Seasonal, Wits and Variety, are all down between 6 and 13 percent, while still making up 22 percent dollar share. So a good chunk of IPA's growth may simply stem from a lack of desire for exploration as the pond dries up.

Golden Ale, the fifth highest-selling category, saw 1.6 percent growth, totaling about 5 percent craft dollar share, and Pale Lagers grew 1.2 percent while Pale Ales suffered a precipitous 8 percent decrease, dropping to craft's sixth highest-selling category overall.

Going down the list, it takes a while to find another bright spot. Fruit/Veggie/Spiced, Bocks, Amber Lager, Amber Ale and Wheat Beer are all down. Substantially. The Ambers are in the low double-digit drops, but Wheat Beer... fell more than 20 percent. What the hell happened to this wonderfully refreshing style?

Here's the theory: There are two main factors at play. One, America is finally hitting hop fatigue and craving lighter, more functional drinking styles that are a little better than Bud. Two, America still wants a bit of bitter backbone – because to the average drinker, that's what makes craft beer taste like craft beer. That's why pretty much every craft style is down but IPA, Golden Ale, Hoppy Lager and Pilsner.

Speaking of Pilsner, it's up 4.2 percent, solidifying the case that America is in its era of refinement, finally.

But only to a certain degree, because Belgian Ales, among the most refined of styles, are down nearly 13 percent. We can vouch for them by citing the extreme competition among imports from Mexican beer, America's desire for light craft and the fact that Belgians are expensive, though justifiably so. We still love you, Belgian Ale. Your time will come.

Stouts, once among craft's stoutest sellers, are down 6.5 percent, accounting for just over 1 percent total dollar share. Kind of hard to believe, but how much liquid cake and pastry can we truly consume before suffering the consequences?

Furthermore, Americans do want to be able to function while imbibing a craft brew, as the term "sessionable" continues to make the rounds as an important buzzword when delivering a low-ABV lager or session IPA. Drinking multiple beers in a "session" sounds like fun, but staying "functional" afterward is paramount.

Perhaps that's why Craft Light Beer is crushing, up 16 percent. Score another point for the theory that we want functionality above all else.

FUNCTIONAL DRINKS

As we regain consciousness from our big, bold bender and functional drinking takes hold, 2025 is the perfect time to explore how to capitalize on "healthy" alcoholic options.

There are plenty of options, and you don't need to look far to find them. Consider all the old methods before trying to do something completely new. Premium-ize your non-alcoholic options with exotic flavor combos, or even better, consider the gold standard of healthy beverage marketing tricks with "knock-on" effects.

With these, you move your brew from "not unhealthy" to "actually health-encouraging," to the individual and to the community. Can it be organic? Non-GMO? Can it incorporate ingredients which contain antioxidants that you can brag about? Can it contain a nip of caffeine to enhance focus and performance? Can it boast natural calming ingredients beyond hops? What about a probiotic element? Research the health effects of your ingredients and you may unlock new marketing avenues.

Further, consider how alcohol affects flavor, and what doors might be opened with its absence. There may be more space to find a unique flavor traditionally consumed in a foreign land, allowing you to tie up novelty, flavor and health all in a neat ribbon. Seek and ye shall find.

TABLE BEERS

Sessionable and light, there's still no reason why table beers can't recover a smidgen of craft's lost market share. Light on resources and the consumer's digestion, they've got a lot of potential waiting to be untapped. If there's any hurdle, it's simply an understanding from the

general public of what a table beer is and how it can best be utilized.

A brewer of this style could do some of the educational legwork with a very clear label and accompanying image – think something like "Roundtable: A Light and Sessionable Ale To Share", (but you can do better on the name.) Then depict characters reminiscent of the children's book characters Frog and Toad sitting around a cozy table pointing to a big, bold "**2.7% ABV**" and you've got a decent start. Utilize a light, crisp base flavor profile to add a gentle note of something slightly more piquant and exotic to help pair with dishes, and you'll be appealing to multiple sub-species of beer connoisseur.

THE END OF NOVELTY

Rounding out Craft's top sellers, there are no more great surprises. Everything else is seeing significant sales drops, from Barleywines, ESBs to Saisons and Special Releases. The clear takeaway is that the honeymoon, explorative, "sex on the beach" phase of America's relationship to drinking craft beer is over, for now. We're getting married, having kids, and considering other means of locking ourselves into lifelong, crippling debt.

With responsibility comes routine. We sacrifice novelty for the sake of stability. There's no shame in that. Barleywines are really not anyone's daily driver. And if they are... you're either the most interesting man in the world, or the fellow with the most cheese puff dust-stains per desk chair. Barleywines are potent vacation beers and once-a-year splurges that transport you to far-flung lands with Barbados rum scent-drizzled, honey-glazed dried cherries... all from the comfort of your favorite recliner.

CATEGORY AND SEGMENTS

Total beer sales are down half a percent this year, about \$200 million, putting beer dollar sales almost exactly at \$39 billion. A deeper dive reveals both winners and losers among segments.

The year's biggest winner, again, is Imports. Up a whopping 4.1 percent from the previous year, they now account for one-quarter of total dollar share, almost \$10 billion. Runner-up among segments is Domestic Premium (think Budweiser, Coors). Though the segment still brought home about \$9.5 billion, accounting for another quarter of total dollar share, it is still down 5.6 percent, more than \$560 million less in sales than the year prior. Undoubtedly, Domestic Premiums are still feeling the crunch of Imports and Seltzers, Ready To Drink (RTD) cocktails and spirits in general, though they've pretty well trounced Craft on retail shelves. More on that later.

Domestic Sub-Premium (Natty Light-types) had a pretty stable, or stagnant year, dropping a mere .2 percent to hold 11.5 dollar share, while Flavored Malt Beverages (FMB) jumped up 7 percent to about 10.5 percent dollar share. Look for FMBs to overtake Domestic Sub-Premium by the end of 2025.

Craft is now in the middle to low end of the pack with its 3.3 percent decline, accounting for almost exactly 10 percent dollar share. Secure, but nothing driving the growth we've seen.

Domestic Super Premium (Michelob Ultra types) continued its steady growth on the back of the aforementioned Mich Skinny, contributing a solid 9.5 percent dollar share, while Seltzer

"Craft beer is no longer booming."

and Cider dropped 9 and 2 percents, respectively. Those two are pretty easily explained between a loss of novelty and competitive squeezes from other categories. No shockers.

NON-ALCOHOLIC: A SOBERING SUCCESS STORY

And then we have Non-Alcoholic beer. You know it, you've tried it a few times, drink it religiously, or most likely, buy a sixer for your weekly meet-up with friends to ensure everyone gets home to their family without having to recite the alphabet backwards. The latter option is the biggest driver for the category's growth. It simply serves a very useful, necessary purpose, bridging the gap between America's need to drink and be merry and do, literally, anything else.

Another banner year for NAs, up almost 30 percent, or \$91 million more in sales, to take a solid 1 percent of the entire beer market. That's pretty wild growth, and as the segment matures, it would not be surprising to see it grow 3-5x in the next couple years. It's a better bet than Mike Tyson over Jake Paul was, sadly. Much firmer on its feet.

TOP 100 BEER BRANDS

Give it up for Michelob Ultra, everybody. At over 7.5 percent of total beer dollar sales and 4 percent growth over the previous year to nearly \$3 billion, its dominance simply can't be ignored. And by that, it's meant that craft brewers should be imitating this beer, because it's objectively great and is, pretty much, the Platonic ideal for what a low-calorie beer should be. It tastes good; it's refreshing; it's firmly planted at the finish line of every marathon, and its function as a dangled carrot is likely responsible for half of the 26.2 stickers you see on car bumpers. This is a crusher of a beer brand, and it deserves its place at the top. In terms of proving where American beer sensibilities are at, look no further.

But it's not actually the top dog, because the true king of beer is currently Modelo Especial. That's right, this glorious imported brew saw 9 percent sales growth to more than \$3.7 billion, and currently accounts for almost 10 percent of entire beer sales. We've cited demographic changes in years previous, but even America's large Hispanic population doesn't fully account for just how popular this brand has become. Its reputation for crushable quality on campuses and reliable drinkability for weekend gatherings make it the Super Mario of beers, well-rounded for all occasions.

Modelo Especial has the beer industry on its back, currently, both in the sense that it is lifting sales and also bowling over the competition. It will be interesting to see whether shifts in the political landscape, like proposed tariffs, drastically affect import sales.

What craft brewers can take away is the necessity of perfecting a Mexican lager and keeping it year-round. Hell, make two or three. One standard, one hoppy and one with a flavor twist, such as Chelada.

LIGHT, BUT NOT BORING

Sales indicate the past, more than present and future. To that end, while IPA may reign, those not new to craft are yearning for a sea change. Simple, quality beer is desired, but perhaps not totally devoid of exoticism. Enter lime.

It's not new, but it never fails to spice up dishes and beverages. Reliable with a twist, light sippers with lime zest are poised to carry significant

volume in the beer taps of 2025. Expect to see it on shelves, and to hear it requested as an alternative to standard ale and lager offerings. Lime bridges the gap from plain Mexican lager to American desire for bold flavor, while not tipping the scales.

TOP 100 BRANDS, CONTINUED

Bud Light is still dry heaving from its Dylan Mulvaney debacle, down another 13 percent from last year, which also wasn't pretty. Unfortunately for this American classic, it's increasingly associated with Kid Rock and aspects of American culture that many are trying to move past. Next up is Coors Light, the Target beer to Bud Light's Wal-Mart. Slightly classier due to its association with the Rockies, and far more stable, sales-wise, dropping just 1.3 percent over last year.

Rounding out the top five is Corona Extra, surprisingly stagnant at .4 percent growth over last year. Why hasn't it seen the same leap as Modelo? For one, it's got less room to grow. It's long been a top-seller. Second, it's slightly stronger: 5.6% ABV to Modelo's 5.4%. Third, Corona is an AB brand, while Modelo is owned by Constellation. AB may be suffering splash damage from its Bud Light woes on the distributor side, and Constellation is simply having a long-term glow-up, growing and advertising more aggressively than any other Vendor. Lastly, Modelo Especial sells more in cans, and Corona sells more in bottles. Cans sell better in bulk and are the common choice for drinking games and portability. Don't discount the packaging and how it affects consumer choices.

Other standouts include Busch Light, Coors and Pacifico, Top 15 Brands which grew 8, 16, and 25 percents, respectively. Twisted Tea and White Claw saw small gains, pointing to the diversity of alcoholic beverage types among top brands. Dos Equis and Heineken saw drops, thanks to Modelo and Corona, to a lesser extent, while Yuengling Traditional Lager is down 11 percent. Fairly substantial, but Yuengling's lighter offering, Flight, grew 37 percent, and recouped around 60 percent of traditional Yuengling's deficit.

Voodoo Ranger Juice Force jumped 20 percent, and Modelo Chelada Limon y Sal and Especial both grew significantly, combining for nearly \$40 million in sales over the last year. Coupled with the growth seen from Victoria (35 percent), it's safe to double down on the assumption that Hispanic Americans, citizens or non-citizens, are heavily impacting retail beer sales.

It's not uncommon for blue collar Latin American workers in the States to grab a 12- to 30-pack, or a couple Cheladas post-shift and share them with comrades. Hard work from sunup to sundown deserves refreshment, and it's interesting to see this cultural pattern reflected in the sales of beer styles, cheladas, specifically, which most non-Hispanic Americans have never tried.

TOP 30 CRAFT BRANDS

Rounding out our survey of beer sales is a clear victor among craft brands: New Belgium's Voodoo Ranger. Behind Blue Moon, which dropped 4.1 percent for a total of 6 percent of dollar share, the Voodoo Ranger imprint holds both the second and third spot by a substantial margin. In a nutshell, if you want to sell craft right now through a retail channel, it probably needs to be a DIPA, Tropical or Hazy IPA.

Hazy Little Thing is next in line, with old faithful Sierra Nevada Pale Ale clocking in just shy of Sam

Adams seasonals. New Belgium, Sam Adams and Sierra Nevada are the Cerberus of large craft brewers, in the best way.

Back to Voodoo Ranger brands, Juice Force grew leaps and bounds, while the relatively mature standard Voodoo Ranger saw another 4 percent growth. Together, they far surpass the sales of Blue Moon and will likely be sitting atop the craft charts in another year or two. When it comes to building and marketing craft brands, New Belgium has set the gold standard, and brewers of all sizes should take notes.

NEW BELGIUM AS TRENDSETTER

If you're not feeling enterprising, you could do a lot worse than following the lead of New Belgium, a company which has consistently stayed ahead of the curve. Who drives trends you ask? Why, none other than the young legal-drinking-age consumer, or "LDA".

Without hard innovation in the craft category, New Belgium is finding ways to present craft beer in novel ways to young drinkers. One head-shakingly simple way is packaging. The Fat Tire-maker has taken to packaging its Voodoo line in 7.5-ounce "Mini Ripper" cans, making what is old new again while appealing to the active and health-conscious, as well as the time-bound drinker, in one fell swoop. Better yet, they're high margin, retailing for just a couple dollars less than standard-sized cans.

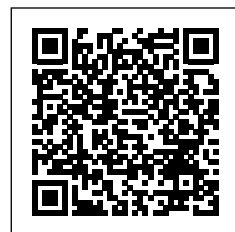
Another perk to the Mini Ripper is its ability to mitigate the potency of high-ABV brews, like New Belgium's Juice Force from the Voodoo Ranger line, which packs quite a punch at 9.5%. Impractical in larger quantities, as are Imperial Stouts, but perfectly sessionable and shareable in 7.5-ounce doses. It's a win-win for New Belgium on this front, while additionally differentiating Voodoo Ranger from its traditional offerings. Expect other breweries to follow suit, experimenting with can size, and even shape, to find ways to reinvent the (not-so-fat) tire.

CREATIVE SPLITS

Another shockingly simple idea which can breathe new life into craft sales is the variety six-pack. Given the strength of variety pack sales, this is a concept with legs... but who knows how to use them? Texas' own Shiner has set the gold standard, in this case, doing ZZ Top proud.

Of the many possible iterations, the most commonly employed are the 3/3 and one-of-each sampler. But don't let that stop you. Shiner has taken the creativity one step further with both seasonal and branded sixers. In summer and winter, they've got Heat Wave and Cold Front, respectively. They've also titled them "Brewery Tour, Family Reunion and Taproom", each adding charm, excitement and ultimately, value, to the standard six-pack purchase.

CONTINUE READING
ONLINE





OFFICIAL REVIEW



Each year, we collect the highest-scoring beers evaluated in the Official Review and compile them into a definitive list of the finest examples. 2024 was a terrific year for brewing, and we've collected the best of the best in the world of beer for you to delve into.

2024 marked a major shift in consumer trends when it comes to beer consumption, as non-alcoholic beers exploded in popularity and hop fatigue seemed to set in, as IPAs tumbled and lagers rose to prominence. Despite those broad stroke takes, 2024 was an amazing year for our Official Review.

A staggering 14 beers achieved our vaunted World Class rating, which tied the record for most beers with scores of 96 or above. A plethora of styles represent our world-class beers, but lagers make up an impressive four selections, with fruit lambics, IPAs, pale ales and specialty wood-aged beers also present among our top beers of the year, alongside many more top-tier examples of brewing excellence. These are just a few of the multitude of beer styles found within, so read on to explore the Top 100 Beers of 2024.

Cheers!
The Editors & Judges

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ABOUT THE OFFICIAL REVIEW

The *Official Review* is conducted in a single-blind tasting format that adheres to the Beer Judge Certification Program 2021 Style Guidelines. This method provides the best opportunity to rely on facts and to avoid favoritism, ensuring a level playing field for all brewers. It serves both the industry and the consumer to have unbiased and objective scores from qualified experts.

In effort to provide the most credible evaluations, *The Beer Connoisseur* hand-selects judges with a minimum BJCP ranking of "National" or Master Cicerone®. Judges are required to work with an assistant that handles beer prior to evaluation, and breweries are not allowed to solicit judges directly.

In the single-blind tasting format, judges are presented with a chilled, properly poured beer and given its style category. Scoring is then done on the following basis using a 100-point scale: Aroma (24 points), Appearance (6 points), Flavor (40 points), Mouthfeel (10 points) and Overall Impression (20 points).

The score breakdown is as follows:

- 100 to 96: World Class – You need this beer in your life.
- 95 to 91: Exceptional – Don't hesitate.
- 90 to 86: Very Good – A brew to savor.
- 85 to 75: Average – Somewhat unimpressive.
- 74 and below: Not Recommended – Just walk away.

TOP 100 RATED BEERS OF 2024

#100 | RATED 85 | VELTINS RADLER | C. & A. VELTINS (GERMANY)

Review by Joseph Formanek | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 32 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

Strong lemon and citrus characters dominate the aroma, delivering a very bright, clean and refreshing character. The fermentation is very clean with no apparent off-notes. The beer is brilliantly clear and sports a light-golden color as well as a fantastic, long-lasting, white, small-bubble head. Flavor-wise, the lemon citrus dominates the palate from start to finish. Sweetness levels are rather high, but bitterness and/or sourness is quite low. This delivers a rather sweet and flabby finish with the sweet lemon notes lingering on the palate long after the drink. The sweetness comes through as an unfermented sugariness, which makes sense if lemonade was just being blended with the base pilsner, masking any flavor or aroma that come from the base.

#99 | RATED 85 | KICKFLIPPER WEST COAST IPA | NEW REALM BREWING (GA)

Review by Richard Wong | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 33 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The pour revealed a yellow hue that had good carbonation with a little bit of chill haze in appearance. The aroma had citrusy notes that were very noticeable. The flavor of this beer revealed nice malt sweetness and, again, citrus notes (grapefruit comes to mind) that were well balanced. The alcohol level was evident as this had a 7% ABV, which is about average for style. It had nice carbonation in the mouthfeel and the body was medium. Very nice, approachable beer that hit all the marks of the style. It had a nice malt sweetness balanced with the bittering hops, which had citrus characteristics. The beer finished dry in the palate. A very drinkable beer for any occasion.

#98 | RATED 85 | PURE CIDER | KELTEREI POSSMAN (GERMANY)

Review by David Sapsis | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The cider pours a medium-gold and is sparkling clear, with only trace gas exchange evident, and no foam or lace to speak of. The flavor starts with a charge of sweet apple juiciness (bright, mixed red and green fresh apple notes). The palate is clean and fruity and medium-dry, bordering on medium, sweetness. While the fruit and sweetness have some balancing acid, there are no appreciable fermentation notes and the alcohol is very subtle. The body is light (as I expect from the alcohol) and only a trace level of CO2 rounds out the finish. Overall, this is a very clean and juicy modern cider, with medium-dry to medium levels of sweetness and a bright, fresh, juicy apple angle.

#97 | RATED 85 | LIGHT 'N HOPPY | SOCIAL FOX BREWING (GA)

Review by Sean Coughlin | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

American Lager is a very neutral style in terms of flavor/aroma, and Light 'n Hoppy simply has too much hop character to be classified within this style. There is a medium-high level of hop aroma that is citrus-forward with a presence akin to a mixed fruit cup. The appearance, however, is true-to-style: dark straw and brilliantly clear with a tightly packed white head that diminishes quickly but never completely vanishes. The flavor follows the aroma and is hop-forward in the balance. Sweet orange peel, canned pineapple and dried mango are front and center along with a medium-high presence of hop bitterness. The hops are so forward that this beer almost tastes a bit grassy.

#96 | RATED 85 | PLACE TO IMAGINE - APPLE PIE | SOCIAL FOX BREWING (GA)

Review by Rick Franckhauser | Aroma: 19 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

Over the years I have grown a little leery of beers that attempt to compare themselves to baked goods. Typically, they tend to either miss the mark or exaggerate the target and often end up being cloyingly sweet or overly spiced. Social Fox Brewing has managed to provide a nice balance of tart apple, spice and sweetness. I would have liked something a little more reminiscent of pie crust, maybe with some graham cracker, a little toasty or doughy malt or a little less tartness and probably slightly less spice overall. While I found it a little more reminiscent of a caramel-coated green apple, than apple pie, it was still an enjoyable fall seasonal ale.

#95 | RATED 86 | SATURNINE FELINE | ATTIC BREWING CO. (PA)

Review by Michael Heniff | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

Saturnine Feline pours black in color with excellent clarity and a medium, fluffy tan head. The aroma is moderate chocolate with a light burnt note; no hops or esters are present (as is appropriate). The flavor is moderate chocolate malt with lighter caramel notes with a slight burnt malt. The finish is quite dry with a moderate/light bitterness with lingering chocolate and burnt malt. This is a very fine beer without any technical flaws, but the drinkability is more like an assertive robust porter than the more delicate and well-rounded Schwarzbier style. I would definitely not pass on this if you are into porters, but beware that this might disappoint if you are looking for a smooth dark lager.

#94 | RATED 86 | PURE CIDER ROSÉ | KELTEREI POSSMAN (GERMANY)

Review by David Sapsis | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The flavor profile is much sweeter than the nose evinces, with a bright shock of fruited apple flavor bursting forth and lasting through to the medium finish; currant flavors seem to dominate, but the apple (very fresh juice-like) is there. Finish is only faintly spritzzy, reflecting the very low dissolved gas level. If not for the acid and reserved fruit tartness, the cider would verge on medium-sweet in the aftertaste, which is long, clean and very fruity. Overall, the cider reflects a current trend in making squeaky-clean fruited ciders that come across as flavored alcopops. This one has a nice sweet-tart apple note complemented by strong cassis sweetness, making for a very fruity offering that is pleasant and direct.

#93 | RATED 86 | EXCELSIOR GROUND CONTROL | SCHILLING HARD CIDER (WA)

Review by Nelson Crowle | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 7 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The bouquet is a moderate level of red table apples and apple skins along with a lightly fruity sweet cherry character. The first sip brings out a nice table apple and apple skin character with just a hint of bittersharp apple, featuring very light tannins and a low Granny Smith-like malic acid tartness, along with a medium-low residual sweetness. Mid-palate a moderate tart cherry note shows up as a complementary flavor to the apple, and they play well together. The cider finishes light, crisp and clean, leaving a slight lingering cherry note that is quite pleasant. This is a good sipper on a hot day and would pair nicely with dry rub baby back pork ribs.

#92 | RATED 86 | GREEN'S GLUTEN FREE TRIPEL ALE | GREEN'S GLUTEN FREE BEERS (BELGIUM)

Review by Jim Koebel | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

The aroma is prominently fruity and also has a bubblegum character. There are underlying flour-like and doughy aromas, which, although not expected in a Belgian-style ale, are a natural byproduct from alternative grains used to create a barley- and gluten-free beer. It pours a light copper color, which would be dark for a traditional Tripel, but an alternative-grain beer isn't expected to adhere strictly to a classic style profile. It has a solid white head that lingers. This beer's flavor is also fruity, with noticeable pear and red apple. The flavor is rich and has a sweetness. It is peppery and nutty. The finish is dry with substantial ethanol warming and some higher alcohols.

#91 | RATED 87 | WELTENBURGER HELL | WELTENBURGER KLOSTER (GERMANY)

Review by Michael Heniff | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 15 / 20

Weltenburger Hell pours golden in color with excellent clarity and a huge, fluffy white head. The aroma is primarily moderate-light bready and pils malt with light herbal hops and light berry esters. The flavor similarly features bready and pils malt with a hint of herbal hops. Unfortunately, the inevitable flaw of oxidation is starting to affect this sample. The finish is of moderate-light bitterness with a very light pils malt lingering. Weltenburger Hell is a very good Helles. I have had it fresh many times before and it never disappointed. But, unfortunately, this example is just a little past its prime. Be sure to seek this Helles out when you know that it will be fresh.

#90 | RATED 87 | HERE WE GO HAZY IPA | KIT NA BREWING (ME)

Review by Dan Martich | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

This opens with moderately high aromas of pine, floral and tangerine fruity notes. This is followed up by a low degree of grainy malt in the background. At times the hop character is herbal and dank. There are plenty of flavor hop characteristics of tangerine, and a small amount of pineapple intermingled with piney and floral hops. The finish is very dry, with a moderately high degree of bitterness; this isn't a juice bomb – it's a firm example of a hazy IPA without the added sweetness. This is medium-bodied with high carbonation making the mouthfeel seem fuller on the palate. It is absent of astringency and warming alcohols. A very good beer to savor.

#89 | RATED 87 | SOUTH PACIFIC IPA | PFRIEM FAMILY BREWERS (OR)

Review by John C. Tull | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 4 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

Hop flavors are intense with strong citrus qualities, particularly grapefruit rind and pith notes. Some tropical fruit notes are layered beneath the robust citrus flavor and overall intense hop bitterness. Overall, this is a solid hop-forward IPA that successfully delivers a whopping hop profile with minimal to no distraction. The nearly singular focus on the hops with very little malt expression or complexity is indicative of the current evolution of the American IPA style as solely being vehicles for the delivery of hops, and away from the format that showcased hops in a malt-forward beer. I note this because the style guidelines, particularly the color expectations for the style, are currently mismatched with brewing trends for American IPAs.

#88 | RATED 87 | SAMUEL SMITH'S ORGANIC CHOCOLATE STOUT | SAMUEL SMITH'S BREWERY (UNITED KINGDOM)

Review by Dan Preston | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The aroma is very sweet and predominantly milk chocolate, like chocolate mousse with a light roast as well as notes of raisin and caramel. It's like a freshly unwrapped 3 Musketeers bar after pouring out the Halloween bag of candy. The flavor is similar but brings the chocolate and sweetness up another notch. It's decadent and sweet like French silk pie sprinkled with toasted sugar, espresso powder and bits of toffee bark. It's even smooth and silky on the palate, with a creamy, moderately full body and moderately low carbonation. Although the sweetness and sugary notes are high, there is just enough bitterness to avoid being cloying. The low bitterness is about the only hint that hops are present.

#87 | RATED 88 | STONE FIGHT ON! PALE ALE | STONE BREWING (CA)

Review by David Sapsis | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The aroma presents a strong biscuity, toasty malt front with a light herbal-earthy hop character more akin to UK varieties than modern, New World types, but with a complementing stone fruit ester that is pleasing. Overall, the nose is herbal and dry and only faintly features citrus/pine notes; instead, it has some very distinct sweet toasty and caramel malt notes – making it somewhat more malt-forward than I would expect for an APA. Still, it is nice and beery. The flavor starts creamy-malty with kilned malt toastiness and a light honey caramel that trails to a mid-palate of stone fruit, herbs and restrained bitterness estimated at roughly 25-30 IBU. The late palate has a definite sweet angle of lingering malt.

#86 | RATED 88 | CLAUSTHALER ORIGINAL | RADEBERGER (GERMANY)

Review by Joseph Formanek | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

The beer is a crystal-clear light yellow-straw color with a very impressive stand of small, white-bubbled head with fantastic retention and lace. Beautiful! The flavor is quite clean, but a residual malty sweet character is noted up front, which builds to a rather sweet finish. The aftertaste is pretty much all malt sweetness with extremely subtle hop flavor and bitterness noted. Over time, that sweetness does become a bit cloying. The body is medium-thin but becomes a bit thicker in the finish as the sweetness comes to the fore. The carbonation is moderate. Overall, this is a clean, somewhat sweet brew that serves as an impressive NA international pale lager.

#85 | RATED 88 | VANILLA TRIPLE DOG | ABITA BREWING CO. (LA)

Review by Dan Preston | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

This beer pours a dark brown color with a big foamy tan head that lasts for days. Despite the dark color, there is good clarity around the edges where I can see light. The aroma is sweet and complex with strong notes of milk chocolate, vanilla, caramel, burnt sugar, rich bread crusts, raisins and black cherry. The flavor is similar, but with stronger notes. The rich melanoidins really come through in the flavor and linger in the back of the mouth. Deep brown bread crusts, chocolate and strong caramel are all present, and it is reminiscent of a glass of chocolate bread pudding with a dollop of French vanilla ice cream and caramel drizzle on top.

#84 | RATED 88 | FRANKFURTER APFELWEIN | KELTEREI POSSMAN (GERMANY)

Review by David Sapsis | Aroma: 19 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma starts with medium levels of aged apple juice with a nice fruity angle and a soft tartness with hints of bitter and sharp tannic dry notes (white pepper?). The impression gives off a mix of green and red apple flavors and is fresh and juicy. The flavor largely matches the aroma with a full apple fruitiness dominating alongside nice acidic tones and soft sweetness. Again, only modest levels of tannic sharpness counterpoise the overall juicy fruitiness that dominates. The aftertaste is medium-dry with some lingering expressed sweetness that lasts a long time. The cider would reach medium sweetness if not for the deft use of some tannic notes adding a light pepper character.

#83 | RATED 88 | EXCELSIOR IMPERIAL APPLE | SCHILLING HARD CIDER (WA)

Review by Brian Eichhorn | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

This cider pours a deep burnished gold with a faint haze to it. Nose is super clean and expresses a deep apple character, almost fresh juice-like. I get a hint of jasmine and other herbal aromatics from the apples. Again, clean and nice. On tasting, medium-sweet at least, if not fully sweet, and it has a ton of supporting clean acid and a decent hit of tannin structure to help even it out. On tasting, I get a lot of fresh cider notes, more so than a wine-like fermented character. Carbonation is a touch low for me, as a bit more could lift some of that sweetness. Very clean and fun, but definitely on the sweeter side.

#82 | RATED 88 | CINNAMON ROLL DUNKEL | OLD 121 BREWHOUSE (CO)

Review by James Link | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

Upon initial pour, a full sweet fragrance of vanilla was evidenced with bready malt and cinnamon contributing a supportive role (or roll, as it were). This beer was mahogany in color and very clear with a firm beige head that maintained itself throughout this review. As was the case in the aroma profile, vanilla was dominant and a bit overstated. The malt-accented base beer was full, well-conceived and played its part in supporting the spices and noble hops. The body was full a light alcoholic warmth that led to a somewhat dry finish. This is a thoroughly unique brew. If there was such a thing as a breakfast beer, this might be perfect for complementing your morning cinnamon bun.

#81 | RATED 88 | STONE 27TH ANNIVERSARY LEMON SHARK DOUBLE IPA | STONE BREWING (CA)

Review by David Sapsis | Aroma: 19 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma has an initial strong worty-honey note with some rich resinous and fruity notes of peaches, banana and papaya without being overtly tropical (I think due to the strong sweet honey malt foreground). Like the nose, the first impression of flavor is very sweet and nectar-like early, but trails quickly to a big, spicy, dry/bitter charge before the mid-palate malt catches up with intriguing flavors of orange blossom, unripe peaches, faint pineapple and some honey/resinous floral and herbal notes. Overall, this beer hits the mark for a DIPa: it is hop-forward with very big golden malt strength, and lots of hop/ferment character that is lush but still somewhat dry and drinkable.

#80 | RATED 89 | GOUDEN CAROLUS CUVÉE VAN DE KEIZER ROOD (2024) | BROUWERIJ HET ANKER (BELGIUM)

Review by Nelson Crowle | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 4 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The beer pours a slightly hazy light gold with a large fluffy ivory head that is persistent and leaves Belgian lace as the beer is consumed. There is a medium bready and grainy malt aroma that supports a medium black pepper note and moderate fruity notes of apricot alongside a slight mandarin orange note. The flavor has a fairly high alcohol note that is mostly clean but quite prominent. Fairly grainy malt notes with moderately high spicy black pepper flavors lead to a quite fruity ripe peach and orange expression. Medium floral and herbal hop notes with moderate hop bitterness are quite smooth throughout. This is a fairly full-bodied beer.

#79 | RATED 89 | BARREL AGED SAISON VII | PFRIEM FAMILY BREWERS (OR)

Review by James Link | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 35 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

When served from a 12.7-ounce corked bottle this reviewer was greeted by a resounding pop and a burst of white foam, which, when poured, resulted in a substantial rocky head. Pale yellow in color and very turbid with heavy Belgian lacing. The aroma was vinous and exhibited tropical fruit notes of pineapple and other citrusy aromatics in harmony with intense hoppiness. Like the aroma profile, passion fruit and citrus flavors dominate yet come across as somewhat astringent and acidic with a tannic grape skin bite and a touch of Brettanomyces in the background. The body was thin to medium, highly effervescent and finished dry as per style. This beer was unique with lots of complexity.

#78 | RATED 89 | APFELWEIN KIRSCH | BEMBEL WITH CARE (GERMANY)

Review by Nelson Crowle | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The cider pours a very clear deep amber with a slight reddish tint and a small head of tiny white bubbles that quickly fades to a small ring. The aroma has moderate table apple notes, with a medium tart red cherry note. The flavor is of tart cherry with a low red table apple note backing it up. There is a moderate acidity, and the tartness of the cherry adds complexity and interest. Tannins are fairly low without bitterness and just a slight pleasant astringency. Moderate residual sweetness is well balanced by the acidity and light tannin notes. The cherry notes are prominent with the apple taking a background supporting role.

#77 | RATED 89 | SAMUEL SMITH'S OATMEAL STOUT | SAMUEL SMITH'S BREWERY (UNITED KINGDOM)

Review by Dan Preston | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 34 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma is all about the esters from the characteristic Yorkshire yeast, as it is loaded with sweet fruits like plums, dates, black cherries, prunes and raisins. Beyond the fruit there is caramel, coffee and cream, with mild roast and cocoa. It's like the first slice of a freshly baked Black Forest cake with chocolate and cherries wafting thru the air. The flavor is similar, again with lots of dried fruits, mainly prunes, figs, raisins and dates. The esters lead into plenty of malt with nutty oats, toasted grains and mild roast. Breakfast in a glass, like fruit and nut granola with a latte. A great example of a beer that earns its spot on the BJCP's "commercial examples" list.

#76 | RATED 89 | TURD FERGUSON | MONIKER BREWERY (RI)

Review by Brian Eichhorn | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

In the glass, it's a deep gold and quite hazy with a creamy white head that falls to a striking ring around the glass. On the nose, a good mix of fruit, including stone fruit, like plums and peaches, as well as some pineapple and guava are present. Not really much in the way of the malt here, as it's all about the fruity hops. On tasting, a decent level of bitterness comes across, increasing its drinkability. This is followed by more mango and guava and less plums. It is a little fizzy and almost watery on the palate, but still very drinkable. Well-made but could use a bit more pop to the hops.

#75 | RATED 90 | MULLED CIDER | KELTEREI POSSMAN (GERMANY)

Review by David Sapsis | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma starts with red and green apple notes below a nice, yet fairly assertive, cinnamon/clove spice, with light but clear sweetness. The flavor starts light with fresh red table apple notes but quickly gets knocked back by the mulling spices blending with a medium to medium-dry level of sweetness in the mid-palate, rounded out by just a touch of tannic bite. The finish is off-dry with lingering mulled spice and what seems to be a note of ginger. Only the faintest trace of carbonic gas is here, effectively rendering the cider as still. As a spiced cider this is a pleasant and straightforward example, with mostly sweet table apple flavors mixing with the sweet cinnamon and peppery spicy clove.

#74 | RATED 90 | APFELWEIN GOLD | BEMBEL WITH CARE (GERMANY)

Review by Nelson Crowle | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The cider pours a clear, yellowish deep straw color with low bubbles leaving a cordon ring of tiny white bubbles behind. The first sniff presents as moderate red table apples with a fairly bright note. As the cider warms, the aroma is a bit fruitier with just a smidge of apricot stone fruit and a slightly higher note of apple skins. The flavor echoes the aroma with a medium level of red table apples and a slight complexity added by apple skin notes. Moderate acidity balances out a medium residual sweetness with a low tannin astringency barely showing a presence without any bitterness. The cider has a medium body.

#73 | RATED 90 | GREEN'S GLUTEN FREE AMBER ALE | GREEN'S GLUTEN FREE BEERS (BELGIUM)

Review by Jim Koebel | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

This beer's aroma is an uncomplicated combination of caramel and earthy hops, which is medium in intensity. It pours a pretty copper color with haze, which is acceptable for an alternative grain version of this style. The flavor has a mild and clean caramel character that becomes more nutty as it warms. Hops are earthy, just like in the aroma, and lend a medium bitterness. This beer is crisp, dry and highly carbonated, making it very refreshing. Overall, this is a meat-and-potatoes example of an amber ale, and there's never anything wrong with that. In this case, that's all the more impressive due to its gluten-free grain bill.

#72 | RATED 90 | ALPHA ABSTRACTION VOL. 27 | WILD LEAP BREW CO. (GA)

Review by Jim Koebel | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

This double IPA starts out with a pulpy, juicy hop aroma. It is dense with orange, grass and pith notes. There is an underlying layer of clean malt and a twinge of ethanol. The flavor is quite bitter and features grapefruit and light pepper; the bitterness intensifies into the finish. This beer has a medium-full body and is well carbonated, creating a very filling sip. It is warm in the finish and, thankfully, not at all astringent despite the high level of hop additions. It leans into bitterness and the pith components of its fruit character. This is a showcase of what can be achieved with a heavy-handed emphasis on late-addition dry-hopping.

#71 | RATED 90 | DOUBLE BARREL IMPERIAL KOROVA | GNARLY BARLEY BREWING CO. (LA)

Review by Michael Heniff | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

This beer pours black in color, is opaque, and sports a very small and wispy tan head. The aroma is prominent bourbon with a lighter sherry aroma and light vanilla note. Chocolate malt is apparent in the aroma, but it takes a backseat to the spirits. The flavor is chocolate malt that is well-balanced with moderate spirit flavors of bourbon and sherry. The body is medium and the mouthfeel is silky smooth with a pleasant warmth and very light carbonation. This is a solid barrel-aged strong beer. The bourbon and sherry both complement the dark malt well. The malt profile was a bit simple, but it did not detract from the overall enjoyment.

#70 | RATED 90 | BRETТА V | PFRIEM FAMILY BREWERS (OR)

Review by Rick Franckhauser | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Overall, a very nice and refreshing yet interesting beer to experience. The use of yuzu is an excellent choice to bring in citrus without the pithiness or impression of acidity often accompanying other citrus fruits. Nice supporting malt and bitterness help to balance the beer. While I wanted more Brett character, it still played an important role in bringing some interest with the earthy, spicy and lavender notes. The beer was an easy-drinking beer but maintained interest and some subtle complexity. This is a beer that I would love to have multiple bottles of for sampling every few months to experience the evolution of the Brett over the next year or two, maybe even more.

#69 | RATED 90 | SINFULLY WICKED | THE ORIGINAL 40 BREWING CO. (CA)

Review by Nelson Crowle | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

A big sniff features a lot of grapefruit and grapefruit zest then medium tangerine and light pine notes, all laid on top of a light bready note featuring just enough malt to support the substantial hop aroma. The first sip echoes the grapefruit and tangerine notes with a firm, clean bitterness that lingers into a citrusy finish. This beer has a moderately light body with just a hint of clean and pleasant alcohol. A clean fermentation showcases the hops, but with some light fruity ester notes of ripe peach. As the beer warms, the fruity esters become more prominent. Overall, a very tasty and enjoyable beer that is a good example of the West Coast style of American IPA.

#68 | RATED 90 | LUCENTE | ATTIC BREWING CO. (PA)

Review by Michael Heniff | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

This beer pours light-golden in color with a slight haze and a small, finely beaded white head. The aroma is light pils malt with moderately light hops with notes of honeydew melon and white grape. The flavor is dry with hop flavors of pears and white grapes. The beer finishes moderately bitter and dry with moderately light white grape and honeydew melon hop flavors over a hint of pils malt. Lucente Italian Pilsner is a solid, unique pale lager. The Hallertauer Blanc hops add a very interesting hop flavor with notes of white grape, honeydew melon and pears. The quaffability is superb. Seek this out if you like pale lagers or if you're interested in a unique hop character.

#67 | RATED 90 | VALKYRIE PORTER | MONIKER BREWERY (RI)

Review by Sean Coughlin | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The malt character in the flavor is more complex than the aroma's, but there is still a lack of coffee and oak. Coffee emerges more as the beer warms, but I believe that has more to do with psychologically trying to search for that flavor profile than it actually being present. Specialty ingredients/processes aside, this is a very tasty beer. Hops are well-integrated in bitterness and subtle but appropriate in flavor for the style. The body is appropriately medium-full and there is a light creaminess in the mouthfeel. The coffee may be so harmonious that it simply gets lost in this delicious beer – and that is okay, but a more present coffee note would be welcome.

#66 | RATED 90 | CLAUSTHALER IPA | RADEBERGER (GERMANY)

Review by Joseph Formanek | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma does have sweet malt notes up front, with a strange lack of hop aroma considering that this is apparently a dry hopped brew. The flavor has a grassy, hop water-like character with a touch of hoppy vegetal notes that presumably arise from the dry hopping. There is a moderate level of bitterness present that helps balance out the residual malt sweetness present in the brew. Minty hop flavors come through in the middle, finish and aftertaste. The hop bitterness helps dry out the finish and prepares the palate for the next sip. The body is thin to medium, and the carbonation is moderate, which also helps cut the sweetness in the finish.

#65 | RATED 91 | HAUS MARG | GNARLY BARLEY BREWING CO. (LA)

Review by Brad Darnell | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 4 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

As I waft the beer slowly in circles just under my nose, the acidity, both lactic and citric, becomes more prominent, and the freshness of squeezed tangerine and lime notes become the dominant aromas. Just underneath the fruit and acidity are a light sea breeze aroma of salt air and medium-light raw sourdough. My first sip is medium-tart and acidic, and slightly salty sourdough bread. Lime is the dominant fruit flavor with a tangerine base that offers subtle citrus complexity. The beer is boldly tart, sour and acidic while remaining quaffable and refreshing. Light bodied with medium-high carbonation, not quite effervescent as is typical with the base gose. Don't forget some cured meat to accompany this bright, refreshing brew!

#64 | RATED 91 | THE RUSSETS | SNOW CAPPED CIDER (CO)

Review by Brian Eichhorn | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The nose has a fresh apple sauce quality and beautiful apple depth. The nose certainly suggests sweetness with underfermented cider, which is very pleasant. Slight white pepper note present as well. Very deep nose that reminds me of cyser almost, with a honeyed edge. On tasting, up front it has a bracing sweetness that is pulled back in check by the acid and alcohol, as well as some lush tannins. I'm not huge on sweetness in cider, but this manages to really hit that high-quality sweetness, allowing both the raw fruit and wine-like character to work together. Plus, there's plenty of carbonation to help carry this through. I love the fruit expression they are able to get here.

#63 | RATED 91 | 2024 VINIFERA SAISON | PFRIEM FAMILY BREWERS (OR)

Review by John C. Tull | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma is earthy and woody with fruity background notes. A mild caramel malt aroma comes through, rounding out hints of acidity as they reach the nose. The flavor is both malty and tangy, providing a nice sweet and sour contrast. An umami quality that is reminiscent of a Flanders red is present and carries through into the finish with a lingering tangy quality. A fruity quality is also noticeable in low quantities, perhaps best described as underripe raspberry. The mouthfeel is moderate with considerable acidity that also carries into the finish. Overall, I find this to be a quite enjoyable specialty beer that has wild ale qualities without being overly wild, a malty backbone and interesting aroma and flavor complexities.

#62 | RATED 91 | HELL OR HIGH TWILIGHT | 21ST AMENDMENT BREWERY (CA)

Review by Brad Darnell | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

My first full sniff yields bready wheat malt as a sturdy base for the strong citrus character. A full quaff and I get medium-intensity sweet, candied orange peel alongside sweet bready wheat malt. I swirl again, and the head is easily roused and provides a fresh bouquet of candied orange peel. Grabbing a few more quaffs, I find low hop bitterness that somewhat restrains the double punch of candied orange and wheat malt sweetness. As with the aroma, the fermentation character is neutral and clean, and the beer is malt-dominant (over the hops) and mostly balanced with the citrus character. This easy-drinking ale is medium-bodied with medium-high carbonation and no warmth, astringency or creaminess and is perfect for many occasions.

#61 | RATED 91 | FRÜH KÖLSCH | CÖLNER HOFBRÄU FRÜH (GERMANY)

Review by John C. Tull | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

A light grainy sweetness is evident along with a very subtle, nondescript fruity quality right away. The color is dark straw, not quite gold, and this beer is exceptionally bright/clear. The flavor is slightly bready and grainy with hints of mild fruitiness, which are, again, nondescript and subtle. Hops lend a mild bitterness that balances nicely with the grain flavors. This beer is soft on the palate and not quite creamy. There is a tiny hint of age sneaking into this particular example, which indicates that the fragile qualities of a Kölsch are fading with time. The body is medium, and carbonation lends a very light carbonic bite towards the finish. Overall, this is a great Kölsch.

#60 | RATED 91 | IN BETWEEN TIMES - HIBISCUS BLOOD ORANGE | SOCIAL FOX BREWING (GA)

Review by Sal Mortillaro II | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

This beer pours a beautiful raspberry red color with a medium haziness. A high citrus aroma is apparent and is very bright and fresh with a low candy-like note, which dominates the entire nose. Though slightly one-dimensional, it is very lovely and invites the drinker to take multiple sniffs. On the front of the palate is a medium-high blood orange flavor followed by a medium-low tartness. There is a low touch of grainy malt. In the finish is when the hibiscus manifests itself and the blood orange carries through and lingers. This beer is thin-bodied with medium-low carbonation. The combination of the tart citrus and acid makes the drinker salivate and perpetuates for another sip.

#59 | RATED 91 | PFRIEM RUM BARREL-AGED PORTER WITH COCONUT | PFRIEM FAMILY BREWERS (OR)

Review by Sal Mortillaro II | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 16 / 20

This beer pours dark brown and is opaque even when held up to the light. On the initial smell, there is a medium barrel note present with lactones of marshmallow and coconut. Wisps of rum come through in low intensity as it warms. The initial flavor is of medium sweetness with medium chocolate malt flavor. There is also very low vanilla and a low flavor of woody barrel character. This beer finishes medium-sweet, though aided by the wood and alcohol and balanced towards the malt. The finish is lovely and complex consisting of chocolate, vanilla, a touch of roast, cherry ester, ethyl alcohol and very light rum. Overall, this an Exceptional beer, though it lacks standard Baltic porter complexity.

#58 | RATED 91 | AMENDMENT LAGER | 21ST AMENDMENT BREWERY (CA)

Review by Brian Eichhorn | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 39 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

This one pours a super-pale straw color with the faintest haze and a persistent white head. The nose is a bit more characterful than I'd usually expect, sending up some herbal hop notes, along with fresh lager yeast character. Low sulfur notes and a bit of that cellared quality you expect from a lager are present. Upon tasting, it moves away from that character and is more malt-driven. Balanced bitterness with a low herbal hop flavor lends a crushable edge to this brew. The malt falls off in the crisp finish. The one detracting thing I'm getting is a bit of an oily, caprylic character that does detract from the crispness. Well balanced and very tasty overall, though.

#57 | RATED 92 | OLD 121 LAGER | OLD 121 BREWHOUSE (CO)

Review by David Sapsis | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma shows off a nice bright cereal-corn note with a hint of cracker sweetness and a wispy light peppery hop note. The nose is light but still significantly richer than a typical industrial version of the style, and I detect no DMS or acetaldehyde. The flavor is quite light in malt character, showcasing a crackery/bready note to complement a light, white corn-like angle, with very modest bitterness, estimated around 12 IBU. Gas level is appropriately high and adds to the crisp nature of the beer, a foundational element for the style. Overall, this is a very nice example of an American lager, with expressive cereal-like malt structure and balanced hop character all in a refreshingly dry package.

#56 | RATED 92 | GREEN'S GLUTEN FREE DUBBEL ALE | GREEN'S GLUTEN FREE BEERS (BELGIUM)

Review by Jim Koebel | Aroma: 20 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma of this barley-free dubbel is mild overall, with gentle fruit esters and a specific note of fig. Its flavor is much more robust than its aroma and is rich with plum and fig character in addition to generic esters. The flavor has a mildly sweet impression, but is still well attenuated, spicy and clean in the finish. The overall richness creates a medium-full body that is well balanced with adequate carbonation. These characteristics, too, mirror a classic dubbel, and you'd have to be a tasting whiz to notice this is brewed with 100% alternative grains. This is a tasty beer and a very good example of a dubbel, regardless of its ingredients.

#55 | RATED 92 | BOURBON BARREL AGED FRENCH MACARON STOUT | PFRIEM FAMILY BREWERS (OR)

Review by Richard Wong | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma had a very strong and wonderful presence of bourbon and oak along with hints of roasted malts and coconut. The first sip of this beer revealed the complexity of roasted malts with hints of chocolate and subtle coffee notes along with the ever-present flavors of bourbon and oak. The alcohol is quite evident in this beer, as it should be at 11.5% ABV. As such, this beer should be enjoyed in small pours especially during the cold, dark winter months. The mouthfeel and body of this beer are medium-heavy with a nice carbonation level. The aftertaste had a nice alcohol burn in the finish with complex flavors and smoothness in the palate.

#54 | RATED 92 | DOUBLE JUCIFER | GNARLY BARLEY BREWING CO. (LA)

Review by Michael Heniff | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Double Jucifer is brewed with Citra and Mosaic Cryo hops and measures in at 8.5% ABV. This beer pours golden in color, is hazy, and holds a clingy, small white head. The aroma is prominently hoppy, featuring citrus fruits such as mangoes and tangerines. A hint of malt sneaks through the strong hop aroma. The flavor is again prominently tangerine and generic citrusy hop flavors with malt hidden behind the aggressive hoppiness. The beer finishes moderately bitter with lingering tangerine-flavored hops. Double Jucifer is a solid double IPA. It is eminently drinkable despite its strength. The citrusy hops punch you in the face from first whiff to the late finish.

#53 | RATED 92 | SUN SICK DAY | MONIKER BREWERY (RI)

Review by Randy Scorby | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 36 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Sun Sick Day Gose features a deep yellow color with significant haze, and a light ring of white bubbles that clings to the side of the glass. It delivers a prominent aroma of fresh, ripe mango with a suggestion of ripe pineapple. The flavor follows the aroma with prominent fresh, bright and ripe mango with a candy-like sweetness leading the charge. Light bready wheat emerges mid-palate along with a moderately light and pleasant lactic sourness and light saltiness. The lactic sourness is sharp and clean. This is an enjoyable and well-brewed fruited gose with an abundance of mango, complemented by a balancing light, salty character and moderately light acidity.

#52 | RATED 92 | KANGA BREW | NEW REALM BREWING (GA)

Review by James Link | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Aromatics were perceived in higher amounts than would have been expected for style. A defined citrus note combines with a light noble hop bouquet and faint grainy malt character, all of which is pleasing. As would be expected, both hops and malt are gently expressed in this delicate style, neither one dominating the other in true balance. Very cleanly brewed, crisp with no off-flavors, low in alcohol and very drinkable. The body was thin and properly conditioned. Smooth with no astringency. An easy-drinking lager that was clean yet not so bland as to be almost tasteless, as is the case with many beers of this style. A session beer perfect for a hot summer night.

#51 | RATED 92 | KINGSTON BLACK | SNOW CAPPED CIDER (CO)

Review by Brian Eichhorn | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

The nose on this is fantastic. Great apple skin and perfumy notes, green fruit and pleasant white wine aromatics. There's a freshness, but also an austerity that I really appreciate in the nose here. Pours a burnished gold with brilliant clarity and lazy sets of bubbles suggesting the lower end of sparkling or even petillant. At the taste, there is a lot of clean alcohol here. The fruit oddly doesn't give off any bruised qualities, which I quite appreciate. This is nearly bone dry, but there's some texture and tannin that gives it structure. The perfumy apple persists into the finish. The fruit character is beautiful, quite ripe and just the right amount of acid here to round it off.

#50 | RATED 92 | CRYOSCAPE COLD IPA | BATSON RIVER BREWING & DISTILLING (ME)

Review by Scott Birdwell | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Batson River Brewing's Cryoscape Cold IPA is a 5.8% ABV cold IPA. The beer pours slightly hazy in the glass (clarity is often overrated!), and the hop bouquet is quite pronounced. While not overdone, it is noticeable and quite pleasant and appealing. There are some malt notes way back in the finish of the aroma, but they are somewhat subdued. On first tasting, I pick up a soft hop bite of citrusy, floral and tropical notes. I found the hop tartness to be somewhat understated considering the promise of the hop bouquet up front. Yet the hop flavor is attractive, and I find that the beer is very well balanced, as it contrasts a hoppy bite with malt sweetness.

#49 | RATED 92 | APPLE PIE-SECCO | NINE PIN CIDERWORKS (NY)

Review by David Sapsis | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma starts with a light but direct green/Pippen-esque apple character with some sweetness and tartness, then blending over into a rich cinnamon-infused and layered apple/fruit bouquet, rounded out by what might be the vanilla influence, but is not obviously vanilla. The flavor of tart green apples underlays a richly spicy palate well balanced by low-level sweetness, lovely clean cinnamon notes and a more fully realized influence of vanilla in the palate. Overall, the flavor is remarkably like a terrific apple pie made with nice, tart baking apples and low sugar content. It is rich and filling but also clean, and it leaves the palate veiled in a light spicy fruit aftertaste that invites another taste.

#48 | RATED 92 | PRAGA PILSNER | PRAGA BREWING GROUP (CZECH REPUBLIC)

Review by Dan Martich | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 17 / 20

Crusty bread flavors coated the taste buds along with spicy hops - possibly Saaz, as Czechs are known to use - adding balance and delivering a higher-than-expected bitterness. There is a moderate amount of malt richness in the background, which is soft, yet keeps the finish dry. This beer is well fermented and conditioned, with no off-flavors. The body is medium and so is the carbonation, which accentuates the dryness. A relatively smooth mouthfeel helps keep the malt profile on the palate. Here's an exceptional example of this style, one that exhibits the malt profile and hop dexterity necessary to be on point.

#47 | RATED 92 | GOUDEN CAROLUS IMPERIAL DARK | BROUWERIJ HET ANKER (BELGIUM)

Review by Joseph Formanek | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma is that of sweet brown malt with a touch of cider and metallic twinge in the back. This is all very typical for the style. The character is moderate but could be more complex as the style guidelines suggest. The brown malt noted in the aroma tends to dominate the flavor as well. It has a rather sweet worty malt character up front with a touch of apple/cider fermentation notes, as typically seen when candi sugar is used in a recipe. In respect to the Belgian notes present, banana dominates the clove, which is quite far in the back. The middle and finish retain their sweetness, with a lingering sweetness throughout the finish and aftertaste.

#46 | RATED 92 | DAD STRENGTH IPA | DAD STRENGTH BREWING (DC)

Review by Joseph Formanek | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The hop flavor is rather light, with a touch of sweet malt coming through in the middle and finish. A moderate hop bitterness is also apparent from the middle well into the aftertaste, delivering a particularly dry character. The dry finish is probably augmented by the lack of noticeable alcohol in the brew, being just 2.9% ABV. Overall, this is a session IPA brewed to be on the lighter side of the spectrum. The hop character is assertive enough to be noted, but not enough to overwhelm the rest of the brew. This judicious use of hops is well appreciated! This is a session IPA that is quite approachable and refreshing, being a summer thirst-quencher that is ultimately sessionable.

#45 | RATED 92 | FOR THE LOVE OF LAGER: GERMAN-STYLE PILSNER | WALLENPAUPACK BREWING CO. (PA)

Review by Rick Franckhauser | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma opens with a moderately high level of spicy and floral hops that are fresh and inviting. The floral hops are more pronounced in the flavor than what was found in the aroma. Some herbal hop flavors also join the party, which are fresh and lovely. Some sweet malt comes through to smooth and round out the bitterness, though the balance tips toward hops. Personally, I'd like a touch more bitterness, but the beer features a very pleasant, medium-dry finish. The beer has a medium-light body with moderate levels of carbonation. I do love a good lager and this pilsner is an excellent example of the style. In fact, it is one of the better American versions I've had.

#44 | RATED 92 | BROAD BLADE | SHOVEL TOWN BREWERY (MA)

Review by Brian Eichhorn | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The nose is great here, showing rich roast and chocolate with a fruity undertone from the yeast. Stone fruit and plum come to mind, along with some light berry notes. The hops share in the fruitiness and also showcase a piney undertone. On tasting, this beer is super chocolaty. There's a distinct roasted bitterness as well, but this really feels like it pulls in a lot of chocolate malt and caramel notes, more so than roasted barley. The beer is quite bitter, both from hopping and from the roasted grains. The fruitiness of the nose really pushes through on the palate as well, layering in some yeast complexity from the esters. A supremely tasty dark brew.

#43 | RATED 92 | OLD 121 ESB | OLD 121 BREWHOUSE (CO)

Review by David Sapsis | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Overall, the nose is malty and faintly sweet, but a toasty note dries it out nicely and invites a taste. The flavor profile starts with low lovibond honey-caramel notes, transitions to a richer, melanoidin-laden malt structure that is very toasty (possibly from kilned Munich-type malts), which countervails against the mid-palate bitterness; a hop note provides subtle balancing bitterness and herbal hop flavor to the dry finish. Some nice dark fruit flavors and mineral notes, along with a light astringency, are present in the mouthfeel and add some fullness, but are in no way obtrusive. While the nose and flavors presented are not deeply emulative of U.K. versions, this beer is a nice strong bitter with appropriate caramel malt.

#42 | RATED 92 | THE PEANUT BUTTER SOLUTION | GNARLY BARLEY BREWING CO. (LA)

Review by Brad Darnell | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

I am presented with a glass nearly full of an opaque black beer with a creamy tan head that slowly recedes to a shorter stand. The heavy, dark chocolate aroma finds its way to my nasal passage long before the beer arrives under my nose, and it is followed by medium roasted peanuts and low roasted malt notes. There are some low alcohol notes floating around, which are on the spicy side of alcohol volatiles. My long-anticipated first sip is of moderate dark chocolate with medium-low peanut butter and medium spicy alcohol. The beer finishes medium-sweet with a dark chocolate cocoa lingering character, though the alcohol adds a drying quality. Pair this sipper with a hefty cheesecake slice.

#41 | RATED 93 | CHAISE LONGUE | THE ESTABLISHMENT BREWING CO. (CANADA)

Review by James Clark | Aroma: 24 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Upon sipping, a medium tart lemon flavor leads to a pleasant puckering sensation immediately followed by a light touch of Brett character supported by a low, spicy grain flavor. This is an excellent beer and an easy-drinking option for sour beer lovers! I really enjoyed both the aroma and flavor; it's easy-drinking and refreshing and a great summer offering (and probably all year if you need a refreshing pick-me-up). From a style standpoint, I only found a few things that keep it from being World Class: the color is light (for style), the finish is not quite dry, it has a slightly fuller body than expected, and it could use slightly more hops in the flavor. Otherwise, outstanding!

#40 | RATED 93 | WELTENBURGER ASAM BOCK | WELTENBURGER KLOSTER (GERMANY)

Review by Michael Heniff | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Asam Bock pours deep amber in color, is clear and has a medium off-white head. The aroma is rich with moderate bready and caramel malt with notes of plum-like dark fruits. The flavor is prominently rich malt with flavors of bread, toast and caramel with a light sweetness. A light, sharp burnt molasses note late in the finish only slightly detracts. Asam Bock is a solid doppelbock that vividly displays the highlights of the style: strength, richness and prominent melanoidins with bready and caramel characteristics. This beer is a bit more caramelly than other doppelbocks but the caramel malt adds to the richness and complexity. Definitely seek this one out.

#39 | RATED 93 | PSYCHOPATHY (2024) | MADTREE BREWING CO. (OH)

Review by David Sapsis | Aroma: 21 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

The flavor profile mirrors the nose, with a bright, light honey malt up front with big but not huge bitterness in the middle, estimated at 50 to 55 IBU. Mid-palate flavors are rich with pine, resin, grapefruit and again that enigmatic rose petal note, which then comes back to the lightly biscuity/toasty/honey malt foundation with a kiss of sweetness rounding out the dry finish. Body is medium, astringency low but there, and the conditioning is high and lively. Finally, the texture has some nice creaminess, which is not surprising given the lasting foam stand/lace evidence. This is a great homage to older, dare I say simpler, IPAs before the infusion of postmodern U.S. hop varieties.

#38 | RATED 93 | PEACEFUL GROOVE | NEW REALM BREWING (GA)

Review by James Link | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

A potpourri of fruity aromatics is immediately perceived in the aroma. Pineapple dominates and is accompanied by a complexity of other fruits with a hint of wheat. The beer pours pale yellow in color with a slight haze, which appears to emanate from fruit pectins. Fruitiness evident in the aroma also dominates the flavor profile. The non-aggressive base malt and restrained hop character allow the fruity flavors to manifest themselves in pleasant fashion. The body was thin as is the case with many malted wheat-based beers with no astringency or alcoholic bite. The fruity character noted in the aroma and flavor here were not artificially created and helped keep it from becoming overly sweet and unbalanced.

#37 | RATED 93 | TASTY IPA | MANHATTAN BREWING CO. (KS)

Review by Jim Koebel | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

This beer has a classic American hop aroma, with resin, pine and light citrus notes. Underneath there is a clean malt base with very light caramel. Tasty IPA pours a deep golden color that's not clear, and it has a dense, tall, white head. The flavor aligns with the aroma. It carries a very firm bitterness with accompanying resinous and herbal hop flavors. The balance is decidedly hoppy, with malt playing only a supporting role. The malt flavor is clean and, again, has a light caramel note. Still, this beer hides its 6.5% ABV very well. There is only a trace of ethanol flavor in the finish. Overall, this beer maintains a smooth impression with medium body and medium-high carbonation.

#36 | RATED 93 | WELTENBURGER HELLE WEISSE | WELTENBURGER KLOSTER (GERMANY)

Review by Michael Heniff | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

This beer pours dark golden in color, is very cloudy and sports a huge, fluffy, off-white head. The aroma is a moderately wheaty malt with lighter bubblegum and banana esters and restrained clove-like phenolics. The flavor is of prominent wheat malt with lighter bubblegum esters and a hint of clove. This is an excellent hefeweizen. It hits all of the marks of the style: prominent wheat, esters, phenolics and cloudiness. What sets Helle Weisse above most hefeweizens is its balance and quaffability. Many have balance issues that turn away some connoisseurs by being overly sweet, too estery or too sharp of a phenolic flavor. This avoids those stylistic flaws and has become one of my favorite hefeweizens.

#35 | RATED 93 | RIVERWEST STEIN NA | LAKEFRONT BREWERY (WI)

Review by Randy Scorby | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma opens up with a prominent bready, grainy maltiness that includes a hit of caramel. The flavor shifts to a more prominent hop character, with moderate orange fruit and light lemon zest. The light herbal hoppiness rests more in the background. A moderate and balancing grainy malt flavor emerges mid-palate, along with a light caramel character that offers an additional layer and light sweetness. The moderate and smooth hop bitterness lingers into and throughout the medium-dry finish. This is a well-brewed NA beer, and the balance between the bready, grainy and caramel malt flavor and the herbal and citrus hop character makes for a very pintable beer. This beer will be a hit with fans of NA beer.

#34 | RATED 93 | DOUBLE PERPETUAL IPA | TRÖEGS INDEPENDENT BREWING (PA)

Review by Brian Eichhorn | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Right off the bat, this beer pours like an old-school DIPa, which is mostly clear with the faintest of hop hazes, a deep gold color and a creamy white head. The nose pops with C-hops that are piney and resinous with a hint of mango to mix it up. On tasting, it's surprisingly balanced. Not the palate wrecker of bitterness I was expecting, though it's definitely bitter and clean, driven by citrus and grapefruit. Sturdy malt backbone props it up with graham cracker and toast. Super drinkable at 9.5% ABV is impressive. I don't get any of that over-extracted alcohol character at all, just classic West Coast DIPa elements. Super-clean and fresh with a great amount of body.

#33 | RATED 93 | GREEN'S GLUTEN FREE INDIA PALE ALE | GREEN'S GLUTEN FREE BEERS (BELGIUM)

Review by Jim Koebel | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Pine, resin and lemon hop aromas are prominent, creating a West Coast impression for this beer. It also carries a substantial malty backbone. The flavor has pine and resin hop notes and is nicely spicy. Its bitterness is medium-high and it lingers throughout the drying but flavorful finish. The alternative grain bill lends a clean "malty" flavor to balance the substantial hoppiness. This beer's medium body actually feels a bit fuller, which is a good thing. It has medium-high carbonation. Combining the West Coast hop character, reddish hue and beefy "maltiness," marketing this as a Red IPA may be more accurate. Still, this is an excellent beer by any standard, and even more impressive given its 100% alternative grain profile.

#32 | RATED 94 | GREAT PUMPKIN | ELYSIAN BREWING CO. (WA)

Review by Brad Darnell | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Whiffs of sweet, doughy pie crust and sweet cinnamon emanate from the pour. Medium-light vegetal pumpkin flesh pierces through, letting me know that this is a fall seasonal, and that this is a pumpkin ale. Underneath, but not far off, are nutmeg, clove and allspice notes. I take a quaff and am greeted with a flavor that matches the aroma, though with a decidedly dry finish, as any pumpkin pie should have. Additional quaffs, swirled among my taste buds and falling slowly down my throat lead me to believe that I am drinking a pumpkin pie. I can taste the pumpkin flesh, its accompanying spices, and a warm, slightly sweet and toasted pie crust alongside soft brown sugar.

#31 | RATED 94 | PFRIEM LAGER | PFRIEM FAMILY BREWERS (OR)

Review by James Link | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aromatics were reminiscent of a sweet, almost honey-like maltiness with bready and floral notes that worked together harmoniously. This was a good-looking beer that unveiled a brilliantly clear pale-yellow color and was topped off with a persistent white head. The flavor profile displayed a gentle balance of bready character, which enhanced the maltiness without being cloyingly sweet and was joined by notes of melon and a faint wisp of sulfur. Medium-bodied and smooth with appropriate levels of alcohol and carbonation as dictated by the style guidelines. A very clean, refreshing and easy-drinking beer that was not insipid in the least, as other light lagers often can be.

#30 | RATED 94 | EASTERNMOST DOUBLE IPA | BATSON RIVER BREWING & DISTILLING (ME)

Review by Scott Birdwell | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

The aroma was very hop-forward, as expected. However, it was not a citrus or tropical fruit bomb as with so many hazies. It didn't take my head off or otherwise blow me away; there's some restraint here. On first sip, I am hit with the hops, as expected. However, not only were the expected hop flavor notes (floral, citrusy, tropical fruit) pronounced, but there was some hop bite there. I'm not talking about West Coast IPA levels of hop bite, but at least some hop bitterness to help balance out the residual grain sweetness. I was appreciative of that bit of bite! This was, in my opinion, a rather well-balanced hazy double IPA.

#29 | RATED 94 | PFRIEM HAZY IPA | PFRIEM FAMILY BREWERS (OR)

Review by James Link | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Pouring from a 12-ounce can into a pint glass revealed a cloudy, pale, straw-colored beer with a prolonged two-inch frothy white head, which released a bouquet of fruity aromatics reminiscent of papaya, mango and mandarin orange. There was also a defined fresh hop presence that complemented the fruity notes. The fruitiness manifest in the aroma profile was also intensely omnipresent in the flavor. Passion fruit and citrus notes married with a biscuit-like wheat character as well as the strong presence of Mosaic hops. Thin to medium in body and non-astringent with an alcoholic warming that contributed to this beer's presence. A classic example of the hazy IPA style.

#28 | RATED 94 | LIME OF THE PARTY | NEW REALM BREWING (GA)

Review by James Link | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

A highly effervescent, well-conditioned beer that delivered a firm tart lemon aroma in combination with other fruity notes that immediately distinguished its uniqueness. Pouring a very clear pale-yellow in color, this beer exhibits a light, bright, large white head that fell off quickly. Sweet and sour flavors melded nicely along with a touch of vanilla and biscuity malt. Salt was barely perceptible yet lent its character to the tip of the tongue without overwhelming. The body was light in nature and highly carbonated. Alcohol warmth was low and led to a finish that was dry but not bitter. A crisp, refreshing beer with a unique balance between sour lemon character and malty goodness that goes down easy and satisfies.

#27 | RATED 94 | HELLESENT | WALLENPAUPACK BREWING CO. (PA)

Review by James Link | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

The beer pours with a pale-yellow color, brilliantly clear with a medium white head that manifested itself upon initial pour but fell off quickly. A light grainy malt bouquet controlled the aroma profile with a faint wisp of hops unobtrusively in the background. Although lightly presented per the style, the malt character was more prominent and expressed cleanly. Hops take a secondary position at levels that allow the malty graininess to shine. The body was thin to medium with alcohol levels consistent with the drinkable nature of the Munich helles style. The brewer captured the essence of the style in a traditional manner without over-hopping or the use of New World hops.

#26 | RATED 94 | THOMAS HARDY'S ALE, GOLDEN EDITION 2018 | MEANTIME BREWING CO. (UNITED KINGDOM)

Review by Michael Heniff | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Thomas Hardy's Ale, Golden Edition 2018 pours amber in color with a moderate haziness and a small rim of off-white head. The aroma is prominently rich caramel and toffee malt; moderate dark fruit plum esters complement the malt. The body is medium-full and the mouthfeel has a moderate alcohol warmth. The beer's flavor is of rich caramel and toffee malt with moderate dark fruit plum esters and minute hops. The beer finishes with a moderately light bitterness and a light sweetness. The finish lingers on with moderate caramel and toffee malt elements alongside a light alcohol warmth. Thomas Hardy's Ale has long been an icon of English barleywines, and this limited-edition example is no exception.

#25 | RATED 94 | UBE HAZY IPA | GARAGE BREWING CO. (CA)

Review by Randy Scorby | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The aroma opens up with cookie dough maltiness that is quickly followed by a mixed tropical fruit hop aroma with an emphasis on mango and a hint of ripe pineapple. The flavor shifts slightly from the aroma with an initial hit of English shortbread followed by a pleasant earthy, nutty character from the ube. The ube definitely adds an interesting and complementary dimension to this beer and pairs well with the base style of hazy IPA. The earthy, nutty, vanilla character from the ube adds another layer to the malt and hop contributions, increasing the complexity of the beer. Overall, the ube is well integrated and an enjoyable addition to an already excellent IPA base.

#24 | RATED 94 | TROPICAL MIST | PURE PROJECT BREWING (CA)

Review by Randy Scorby | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Tropical Mist debuts with a prominent aroma of fresh orange zest and fruit with a very light grainy, bready malt character emerging as the hops begin to fade a little. The fruit also takes center stage in the flavor, and drinking this is like eating a section of fresh, ripe orange. As the citrus fades down, a very light bready malt character develops mid-palate along with a very light but noticeable hop bitterness that hits hard and lingers into the medium-dry finish. This is an incredibly refreshing and well-brewed fruit beer that is the perfect accompaniment to a hot day. It is a crushable beer that is thirst-quenching and enjoyable.

#23 | RATED 94 | 99XPERIMENT | MUTATION BREWING (GA)

Review by Joseph Formanek | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

The aroma is mild, with a dank hop character of citrus, orange and grapefruit notes along with a slight sulfury note coming from the pils malt. The flavor follows the aroma quite well. There is a clean pils malt backbone with a moderate dank hop flavor and bitterness. Overall, this brew is very reminiscent of a cold IPA with pils malt character and cleaner fermentation. It is an enjoyable and refreshing quaffer that has enough flavor to satisfy, while also being restrained enough to balance out the rest of the package. Very nice, and definitely recommended for those who would like to experience a great example of a new take on pilsner.

#22 | RATED 95 | PLACE TO IMAGINE VOL. 4 - BLUEBERRY PIE | SOCIAL FOX BREWING (GA)

Review by Sean Coughlin | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Normally, I write about aroma first in a review because it's the first thing I evaluate. However, with this beer it is impossible to not take notice of the gorgeous color: a bright red that is darkened by some undertones of blue, resulting in something inside the violet spectrum. The head is white but tinged with pink and sadly is completely absent within seconds, which is an expectation for this style. This is a very attractive beer that whets the appetite. The aroma meets the high bar that was set from the visual appearance. This beer smells like freshly baked blueberry cobbler: ripe blueberries within a brown sugar-laden crust. The flavor is fruit-forward with light acidity.

#21 | RATED 95 | TIERS FOR YEARS | IVANHOE PARK BREWING (FL)

Review by Richard Wong | Aroma: 24 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 9 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

The pour revealed a pitch-black hue, which is standard for this style of beer. It had a nice creamy tan head and long-lasting carbonation in the glass. The aroma was outstanding. It had complex aromas that included dark roasted malts, hints of espresso beans and dark chocolate. The pour and initial taste can be described in one word: wonderful! It had nice, complex dark roasted malts, again reminiscent of coffee and dark chocolate flavors, along with a moderate hop bittering that balanced nicely. This beer also had a nice creamy, milk-like flavor due to the addition of lactose in the recipe. A nice beer to enjoy heading into the colder season.

#20 | RATED 95 | NEW GRIST IPA | LAKEFRONT BREWERY (WI)

Review by Randy Scorby | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

The aroma greets you with a blast of citrus hops, primarily lemon zest and grapefruit that are fresh and bright. The flavor follows with a welcome citrusy slap that will satisfy even the most demanding of hop heads. Fresh lemon zest and a slice of grapefruit is the dominant character, with the grapefruit eventually taking center stage. The moderately high hop bitterness enters and lingers into the dry finish, remaining smooth throughout. This is an enjoyable gluten-free IPA that features a prominent fresh and bright hop character with just enough of a malt backbone to balance it out. Even if you are not gluten-intolerant you should give this one a taste, as you may just discover your new hoppy obsession.

#19 | RATED 95 | LAGERED HEDONISM 03 | MONIKER BREWERY (RI)

Review by Randy Scorby | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

The malt takes center stage in the aroma, with prominent and rich toast, bread crust, light chocolate, light roast and a hint of caramel. The flavor delivers a rich and prominent malt character with nuttiness, toast, bread crust, light chocolate and a touch of roast. The very light residual sweetness in the middle dries out nicely in the finish with a light toasty character lingering through the aftertaste. As with the aroma, this beer has a clean fermentation profile in the flavor. This beer rounds out with a medium body and moderate carbonation. This is a rich and well-brewed Czech dark lager that features a clean lager profile and rich malt character.

#18 | RATED 95 | ANDECHSER HELL | KLOSTER ANDECHS (GERMANY)

Review by Dan Martich | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 39 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 8 / 10 | Overall Impression: 20 / 20

The moderate flavor is malty and has the white cracker profile that the use of pilsner malt delivers, though there's also a tiny bit of honey character. The breadiness found in the aroma is pleasantly firm, as if the beer was made with a decoction step, or perhaps the addition of melanoidin malt to intensify the malts. A sweet flavor accompanied by the spicy hops puts the beer on point with the style. The beer finishes softly in both the finish and bitterness, welcoming another sip. This is a medium-light bodied beer with a medium-high carbonation and smooth mouthfeel that represents a truly excellent example of the Munich Helles style.

#17 | RATED 95 | DARK WOODS BARREL-AGED STOUT | BATSON RIVER BREWING & DISTILLING (ME)

Review by Scott Birdwell | Aroma: 22 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

The aroma was, surprisingly, subdued for a barrel-aged, roasty beer of this strength. Fortunately, the beer's true character came through on the palate. On first taste, the barrel flavors shone through. Notes of vanilla and oak (specifically charred oak) asserted themselves. Roasted grain flavors are very evident, but not overly so. Hops are present, and they hold their own but don't mask the malt and grain flavors. I did detect some fruity esters, which is not surprising in a beer of this strength. I also noticed just a hint of astringency in the finish, which is not unexpected for the style, nor was it off-putting. In short, the beer exhibited an excellent balance of malt, hops and barrel notes.

#16 | RATED 95 | QUINCE | NINE PIN CIDERWORKS (NY)

Review by Scott Birdwell | Aroma: 23 / 24 | Appearance: 5 / 6 | Flavor: 38 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 19 / 20

This cider pours a pale straw hue into the glass, with a slight haze (it is bottle-conditioned). The pleasant, attractive aroma is reminiscent of stone fruit. The head dissipates rapidly, as most ciders do. The flavor is tangy up front, followed quickly with a dry finish, perhaps slightly astringent, but not off-putting. The fruitiness promised by the aroma is fulfilled in the finish. It's a complex beverage, and in a word, it is delicious. I can honestly say this is the best quince cider I have ever tasted (especially considering I've never sampled one before). Nevertheless, I like this very much and was very happy when I was shown that it was packaged in a large bottle!

#15 | RATED 95 | GET SET WHEAT | KIT NA BREWING (ME)

Review by Dan Martich | Aroma: 24 / 24 | Appearance: 6 / 6 | Flavor: 37 / 40 | Mouthfeel: 10 / 10 | Overall Impression: 18 / 20

Aromas of coriander and sweet ripe citrus fruit are present, along with a notable herbal element from the spices that helps the beer's sip end on a sweet note. The beer is golden and very hazy given the amount of wheat. The flavor is big and bold, unlike any other non-alcoholic beer this judge has ever had. The flavor profile starts with a moderate amount of grainy malt led by big bold citrus notes, then followed by a presumptive sweetness (brown sugar) before the soft and bitter finish. The hop intensity is low and comes across as spicy. The beer finishes dry and short, which leaves you with a thirsty desire to drink more of it.

WORLD CLASS (100-96)

#14

Nelson Pale

pFriem Family Brewers
Hood River | Oregon

Brewer's Description

New Zealand's Nelson Sauvignon hops have much in common with the Sauvignon Blanc grapes that are harvested nearby. Compare a glass of the wine to pFriem Nelson Pale and you'll see that both boast strong fruity flavors with aromas of honeydew, kiwi and pineapple. You may even taste hints of citrus and white wine in your pint. But don't worry, you can leave your corkscrew at home.

Statistics

Style: American Pale Ale
Style Family: Pale American Ale
Availability: Seasonal
ABV: 5.9%
IBUs: 45
Served at: 40 to 45° F
Hops: Nelson Sauvignon
Malts: Rahr Pale, Simpsons Cara Malt, Simpsons Crystal Dark

Contact

pFriem Family Brewers
707 Portway Ave #101
Hood River, OR 97031

Tel.: (541) 321-0490
www.pfriembeer.com

BREWER Q&A
Read Online



RATING: 96

by Rick Franckhauser

Aroma: 22 / 24
Appearance: 6 / 6
Flavor: 39 / 40
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10
Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Nelson Pale by pFriem Family Brewers was judged as an American Pale Ale. (2021 BJCP Category 18B)

Melon, peach and a little underlying pine resin and citrus all greet the nose at moderately high levels. All notes are very fresh alongside bright hop aromatics. As a personal preference, I did want a little less resin and a touch more melon, for what it's worth. The aroma is very promising and raising expectations for the flavor to follow. There is a note of underlying base malt that's neutral, with no caramel or sweet impression.

The flavor does not disappoint and even elevates what the aroma promised. The melon and peach are joined by pineapple and a low-level white grape. The medium-dry finish with some lingering melon and pineapple carries well into the aftertaste. Very quaffable, nothing is overdone. Medium-light body with moderately high levels of carbonation. A smooth finish with a slight hop bite combines with the carbonation to clean off the palate and prepare for more.

This is an excellent example of an American Pale Ale featuring New World hops. Interesting and inviting hop aromas and flavors are present with a nice, round supporting malt presence. Supremely enjoyable. I suppose a slight elevation of the hops in the nose and maybe a very slight increase of the malt in the flavor would bring the beer to perfection. I would also suppose if I were drinking this beer fresh off the tap at the brewery, I may experience a perfect modern interpretation of an APA.



Fancy a pint?



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#13

Andechser Weissbier Hell

Kloster Andechs
Germany

Brewer's Description

Untreated and bottled with natural yeast turbidity, this is a top-fermented beer for connoisseurs, first introduced on Saint Joseph's Day in 1993 (March 19). It first attracts the eye with its light honey color. A very creamy and finely beaded head invites you to approach this wheat beer from the Holy Mountain more closely. In the finish, the balanced interplay of a slight honey sweetness with an elegant acidity and hop bitterness in the background quickly leads to a harmonious aftertaste that leaves you wanting more.

Statistics

Style: Hefeweizen/Weissbier
Style Family: German Wheat Beer
Availability: Year-Round
ABV: 5.5%
Served at: 40 to 45° F

BREWER Q&A
Read Online



Contact

Kloster Andechs
Bergstr. 2
Andechs, Germany 82346

Tel.: 08152 376-252
www.andechs.de/en/monastery-brewery

RATING: 96

by John C. Tull

Aroma: 24 / 24
Appearance: 6 / 6
Flavor: 37 / 40
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10
Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Andechser Weissbier Hell by Kloster Andechs was judged as a Weissbier. (2021 BJCP Category 10A)

A wonderful expression of yeast and wheat malt aromas emanate from this beer. A classic balance of banana and clove esters and phenols, respectively, is evident with a touch of black pepper in the deep background. Malt aromas are bready and "wheat-like" for a lack of any better descriptors. The appearance is somewhat cloudy from suspended yeast and proteins, more the former than the latter I suspect. The color would be medium-gold, but has an orange-like cast due to the cloudiness. A thin, fine head of tiny white bubbles clings to the glass's edge and floats in amoebic, veiling formations across about one-fifth of the surface.

The flavor matches the aroma with a rich, wheat malt sweetness and full character backed by those same ester and phenol components that met the nose. A very faint hint of oxidation is the only slightly marring quality detectable in the flavor. The mouthfeel is medium with a sensation of fullness that is tempered with a crisp, heavy dose of carbonation that provides a contrast on the palate in the finish. This is a truly world-class example of this style.



#12

Kriek Black Pepper Lambicus

Brouwerij Timmermans
Belgium

Brewer's Description

Our Kriek Black Pepper Lambicus is an authentic yet bold kriek that's crafted with traditional barrel-aged lambic and 100% natural cherries and delicately spiced with black pepper.

Statistics

Style: Spice, Herb or Vegetable Beer
Style Family: Spiced Beer
Availability: Year-Round
ABV: 4.0%
Served at: 40 to 55° F

BREWER Q&A
Read Online



Contact

Brouwerij Timmermans
Kerkstraat 11, Itterbeek
1701 Belgium

Tel.: (322) 569-0357
www.brtimmermans.be/en

RATING: 96

by James Link

Aroma: 23 / 24
Appearance: 6 / 6
Flavor: 38 / 40
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10
Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Kriek Black Pepper Lambicus by Brouwerij Timmermans was judged as a Spice, Herb or Vegetable Beer. (2021 BJCP Category 30A) The base style is Fruit Lambic. (2021 BJCP Category 23F)

This brew's unique bouquet is characterized predominantly by sour cherries and accompanied by lactic and horse blanket aromatics with just a gentle wisp of black pepper.

Upon pouring, I realized this is a very pretty beer and quite clear, manifesting a red cherry hue and capped by a persistent light-pink head.

The flavor profile was thoroughly complex. The in-depth taste of fresh cherries melds well with lactic and Brettanomyces notes alongside just a faint spicy note that complements the potpourri of other flavors.

Thin in body and well-conditioned. A slightly acidic mouthfeel and lower alcohol content create both an authentic and refreshing example of the style.

This is a classic must-try fruited lambic that suggests traditional brewing methods with some unusual additions to produce a striking flavor with notable peppery elements. Lactic notes generally overstated in other examples of this style are nicely balanced here..



#11

Dive Beer

Lakefront Brewery
Milwaukee | Wisconsin

Brewer's Description

This all-malt premium lager pours a pale gold color with a frothy white head. Light-bodied and refreshing with a smooth, clean lager finish. The maltiness is balanced by high-quality imported noble hops.

Statistics

Style: American Light Lager
Style Family: Standard American Beer
Availability: Year-Round
ABV: 4.2%
IBUs: 12
Served at: 45° F
Hops: Mt. Hood, German Saphir
Malts: Two-Row Pale, Dextrine

Contact

Lakefront Brewery
1872 N Commerce St
Milwaukee, WI 53212

Tel.: (414) 372-8800
www.lakefrontbrewery.com

BREWER Q&A
Read Online



RATING: 96

by Randy Scorby

Aroma: 23 / 24
Appearance: 6 / 6
Flavor: 38 / 40
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10
Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Dive Beer by Lakefront Brewery was judged as an American Light Lager. (2021 BJCP Category 2A)

Dive Beer has a very inviting appearance, pouring a bright gold color with brilliant clarity. The white, foamy head forms a thick stand on the beer that dissipates quickly, which is not unusual for this style. The aroma features a moderate grainy, bready character with a touch of cracker that gives way to a fresh and bright spicy and floral hop aroma. There are no esters or diacetyl from the clean lager fermentation.

The flavor follows the aroma with a medium grainy and bready maltiness up front with a moderate floral, spicy hop flavor following the malt. Very low hop bitterness and light residual sweetness develop mid-palate and fade out into the crisp, dry finish. The flavor also features a clean fermentation profile. The medium body and moderately high carbonation offers structure to the beer.

Dive Beer is a world-class offering and is exceptionally brewed. It serves as a crisp, refreshing beer that would be terrific for hot weather but equally enjoyable year-round if you are in the mood to reach for a lighter lager. The noble hop character adds an international flair to this beer and complements the clean maltiness. Highly recommended.



#10

Rain

Pure Project Brewing
San Diego | California

Brewer's Description

A crushable, crisp and clean pilsner made with only the finest ingredients. Rain is built on a blend of pilsner malt and unmalted wheat, with a generous addition of traditional Hallertau Mittelfruh hops. Pure is bone dry and beautifully bright.

Statistics

Style: German Pils
Style Family: Pale Bitter European Beer
Availability: Year-Round
ABV: 5.3%
Served at: 38 to 45° F
Hops: Hallertau Mittelfruh

Contact

Pure Project Brewing
9030 Kenamar Dr #308
San Diego, CA 92121

Tel.: (858) 252-6143
www.purebrewing.org

BREWER Q&A
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RATING: 96

by Randy Scorby

Aroma: 23 / 24
Appearance: 6 / 6
Flavor: 39 / 40
Mouthfeel: 9 / 10
Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Rain by Pure Project Brewing is being evaluated as a German Pils. (2021 BJCP Category 5D)

Rain features a bright yellow color with brilliant clarity and a thick, white foam stand that lingers throughout the sample, creating a very inviting appearance. The beer opens up with a prominent spicy and floral hop aroma that is fresh and bright, with a very light sulfur character that is common in lagers. Behind the hop aroma is a light graininess from the pilsner malt. There is a clean fermentation profile with no esters or diacetyl present.

The flavor delivers much of the same with a prominent spicy, floral, noble hop flavor up front, followed by a light grainy backbone of pilsner malt that emerges mid-palate along with a firm but smooth hop bitterness that lingers into the dry, crisp finish. As with the aroma, this beer has a clean fermentation profile in the flavor with no esters or diacetyl. This beer rounds out with a medium body and moderately high carbonation that adds a little extra zip.

This is a refreshing and extremely well brewed German Pils that brought back many memories of my travels to Germany. The overall hop character is fresh and bright, and there is just enough malt backbone to keep the overall hop presence from being too dominant. A world-class German Pils to keep the warmer weather at bay.



#9

Grape Expectations

Irrigation Ales

Courtland | Kansas

Brewer's Description

This is an imperial porter that was fermented with Frontenac Red grapes from our friend's vineyard, which was originally part of our homebrew club. Once fermented dry, we aged this portion in his red wine oak barrels for six months before carbonation and bottling.

Statistics

Style: Specialty Wood-Aged Beer

Style Family: Wood Beer

Availability: Seasonal

ABV: 10.5%

IBUs: 43

Served at: 50° F

Hops: Centennial, Mosaic

Malts: Pale Two-Row, Munich, Brown, Chocolate Wheat, Flaked Barley, Caramel 120L, Caramel 30L, Chocolate Malt, Carapils, Carafa Special 3

Contact

Irrigation Ales

414 Main St

Courtland, KS 66939

www.irrigationales.com

BREWER Q&A
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RATING: 96

by Jim Koebel

Aroma: 22 / 24

Appearance: 5 / 6

Flavor: 40 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Grape Expectations by Irrigation Ales was judged as a Specialty Wood-Aged Beer.

(2021 BJCP Category 33B)

The base style is Baltic Porter.

(2021 BJCP Category 9C)

Initially, the aroma closely resembles the base Baltic porter style. It is roasty with notes of dark chocolate, baking chocolate and tobacco. An earthy hop character is also present, and the aroma is not sweet or sugary. As it warms, it takes on a distinct and pleasant red wine character.

Unsurprisingly, this beer pours a dark brown color and has a low, tan head. The red wine character is much more apparent and still very pleasant, especially in the flavor, where it contains more complex notes of tannin and oak. None of this clashes with the otherwise bold Baltic porter flavors, which somehow take a backseat here. The flavor is also dry and somewhat bitter. There is no astringency, and the body is medium-full with gentle carbonation.

Overall, this is an amazing beer. It is perfectly aged, and its many complex flavors manage to remain subtle and smooth throughout, which is a nice change from the many run-of-the-mill barrel-aged beers that slam you over the head with their overly bold flavors.



#8

Green's Gluten Free Dry-Hopped Lager

Green's Gluten Free Beers

Belgium

Brewer's Description

Pale golden in color; the nose is a mix of citrusy and floral aroma sensations. Clean with a crisp, light malt taste, but with a herbal and hoppy finish. Body and mouthfeel are light and refreshing.

Statistics

Style: Alternative Grain Beer

Style Family: Alternative Fermentables Beer

Availability: Year-Round

ABV: 4.1%

IBUs: 18

Served at: 42° F

Contact

Green's Gluten Free Beers

Doomzelestraat 20

9080 Lochristi, Belgium

Tel.: (44) 161-456-4226

www.glutenfreebeers.co.uk

BREWER Q&A
Read Online



RATING: 96

by Jim Koebel

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 38 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Green's Gluten-Free Dry-Hopped Lager by Green's Gluten Free Beers was judged as an Alternative Grain Beer.

(2021 BJCP Category 31A)

Prominent herbal and minty hop characteristics make up the aroma of this beer. It's clean underneath the bright hop presence, giving no indication of it's 100% alternative, gluten-free grain composition, but sending unambiguous lager vibes.

This beer pours golden in color, clear, with a moderate white head that lingers. There is a nutty, bready richness in the flavor that works amazingly in this lager, though it is well attenuated and squeaky clean. The barley-free grain bill is likely to thank for this unique flavor, which you won't find in a typical premium lager. Moderate hop flavors, which are again brightly herbal and minty, are dominant and the flavor is firmly bitter. This medium-bodied beer finishes dry and crisp and has medium-high carbonation.

This is a wonderful, world-class beer that truly makes it alternative grain portfolio an asset rather than a detriment. Highly recommended.



#7

Andechser Doppelbock Dunkel

Kloster Andechs
Germany

Brewer's Description

The world-famous bockbier from the Holy Mountain in Bavaria wants to be savored rather than chugged. Its color is reminiscent of dark copper with hints of fiery red. Its bright, clear appearance harmonizes with a firm, finely beaded foam stand. Soft roasted notes and a touch of dried fruit accompany an accentuated caramel aroma. The taste is unmistakable: Full-bodied and velvety, strong but with a pleasant malt aroma – powerful and tasty. A mighty doppelbock that lets you savor and enjoy the centuries-old Benedictine brewing tradition, one sip at a time.

Statistics

Style: Doppelbock
Style Family: Strong European Beer
Availability: Year-Round
ABV: 7.1%
Served at: 45 to 50° F
Malts: Beechwood-smoked malt

BREWER Q&A
Read Online



Contact

Kloster Andechs
Bergstr. 2
Andechs, Germany 82346

Tel.: 08152 376-252
www.andechs.de/en/monastery-brewery

RATING: 97
by Joseph Formanek

Aroma: 23 / 24
Appearance: 6 / 6
Flavor: 39 / 40
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10
Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Andechser Doppelbock Dunkel by Kloster Andechs was judged as a Doppelbock. (2021 BJCP Category 9A)

The sweet beechwood-smoked malt aroma is very evident immediately after you pop open the can. There is a touch of base malt behind it, but very little else comes through. The smoked malt is the star of the show here! The brew is remarkably clear, with a light golden color and a rich, small-bubble, white head with fantastic retention and lacing left on the glass after drinking. Very impressive and inviting appearance.

The smoked malt flavor is moderate and is well within the spectrum for the style. The fermentation is very clean, with the background base beer being appropriately mild to serve as a blank slate for the smoky character to build on. The smoke character dominates the overall flavor from start through the lingering aftertaste, but a slight hammy character is noted in the finish, which is rather common for the style. No hops are noted, which is, again, expected for the style. The body is light-to-medium, and the carbonation is moderate.

Importantly for this beer, the smoked malt character, while dominant, is not overwhelming. The brewery's judicious use of the smoked malt in the grain bill delivers a quite approachable and quaffable beer, which is rather difficult to do for this style.

Overall, this is an interesting and enjoyable world-class offering and certainly one to search out if you get the opportunity.



#6

Lagered Hedonism 01

Moniker Brewery
Providence | Rhode Island

Brewer's Description

The landmark first brew in our Lagered Hedonism series. This Czech pale lager is light, zippy and refreshing.

Statistics

Style: Czech Pale Lager
Style Family: Czech Lager
Availability: Limited Release
ABV: 3.2%
Served at: 38 to 42° F
Hops: Saaz
Malts: Pilsner, Vienna

BREWER Q&A
Read Online



Contact

Moniker Brewery
432 W Fountain St
Providence, RI 02903

Tel.: (401) 648-0150
www.monikerbrewery.com

RATING: 97
by Sean Coughlin

Aroma: 23 / 24
Appearance: 6 / 6
Flavor: 38 / 40
Mouthfeel: 10 / 10
Overall Impression: 20 / 20

Lagered Hedonism 01 by Moniker Brewery was judged as a Czech Pale Lager. (2021 BJCP Category 3A)

This beer is the first within Moniker's Lagered Hedonism series and sets the bar very high for subsequent beers in that series.

This style calls for light-to-moderate bready-rich malt in the aroma and this beer has that in spades. The malt character is pils-dominant, and, with a blindfold on, you may think that someone is freshly kneading bread dough in front of you. The beer is extremely aromatic overall and while dominated by malt, there is a light herbal hop presence that adds complexity. A very light sulfur note dissipated quickly after being poured from the can.

This beer is also attractive – brilliant pale gold with a dense white head that persists exceptionally well. The head on this beer is impressive enough that it could probably pass for a beer poured from a Lukr faucet in the traditional Czech Pils fashion.

There is an amazing amount of flavor present for such a small beer. Following close to the aroma, there is a ton of bready malt to be savored. The hops are not shied away from either – there is substantial hop bitterness and flavor for the size of this beer, but it is within balance and does not overwhelm the malt.

This is truly one of the best domestic Czech-style lagers I have ever had, and I hope that Moniker continues to pump out excellent traditional Euro-style beers in their Lagered Hedonism portfolio.



#5

Framboise Hibiscus Lambicus

Brouwerij Timmermans

Belgium

Brewer's Description

Authentic raspberry lambic. A nice balance between the fruity notes of the raspberries and the subtle acidity of a young lambic of the world's oldest lambic brewery. After one year of maturation of the lambic in oak barrels, 100% natural raspberry juice is added to lambic. The beer turns a delicate pink shade that is sure to delight you.

Statistics

Style: Fruit Lambic

Style Family: European Sour Ale

Availability: Year-Round

ABV: 4.0%

Served at: 40 to 55° F

Contact

Brouwerij Timmermans

Kerkstraat 11, Itterbeek

1701 Belgium

Tel.: (322) 569-0357

www.brtimmermans.be

BREWER Q&A
Read Online



RATING: 97

by James Link

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 39 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

Framboise Hibiscus Lambicus by Brouwerij Timmermans was judged as a Fruit Lambic. (2021 BJCP Category 23F)

A fusion of aromas are lightly expressed to create a unique and complex bouquet in the nose. Sweet yet not candied raspberry notes are first noticed at the onset and are joined by a light presence of tartness and earthiness.

Cardinal red in color and very clear with a pinkish-white head that held up nicely.

For a lambic on the low end of the gravity scale there was a lot of complexity here. The raspberry sweetness up front was balanced by a touch of acidic sourness and just a bit of horse blanket character often found in properly aged lambics, which this one certainly was.

The body was thin yet smooth with a slight acidic bite on the side of the tongue. Carbonation levels were appropriately expressed.

The authentic nature of this beer is clearly visible throughout. Well-conceived, refreshing and very drinkable. A world-class example of a fruited lambic.



#4

pFriem Double IPA

pFriem Family Brewers

Hood River | Oregon

Brewer's Description

Like the name implies, each can of pFriem Double IPA is brimming with doubly rich aromas of fresh berries, notes of papaya and a malty sweetness. Double cheers to that!

Statistics

Style: Double IPA

Style Family: IPA

Availability: Limited Release

ABV: 9.1%

Served at: 40 to 45° F

Hops: Chinook, Amarillo, Simcoe, El Dorado

Malts: Rahr Pale Malt, Weyermann Carahell

Contact

pFriem Family Brewers

707 Portway Ave #101

Hood River, OR 97031

Tel.: (541) 321-0490

www.pfriembeer.com

BREWER Q&A
Read Online



RATING: 97

by Sal Mortillaro II

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 5 / 6

Flavor: 40 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

pFriem Double IPA by pFriem Family Brewers was judged as a Double IPA. (2021 BJCP Category 22A)

This beer pours a beautiful gold with brilliant clarity. A very wispy and fleeting head quickly dissipates, leaving a very thin ring of tiny, off-white bubbles around the rim and a thin, sparse layer on top. It has a high hop aroma consisting of peach, orange skin, low pine and a slight berry-like note. The hop aroma is at the forefront and any malt aroma is hidden behind the hop intensity. This is a very cleanly fermented beer, and the aroma is typical of a West Coast DIPAs from the early 2000s.

On the initial sip, a high hop flavor is first noticeable consisting of low peach, medium-low pine and medium orange. The high hop bitterness is noticeable off the bat; however, a clean and neutral malt sweetness of low intensity helps to tame the bitterness. There is a clean alcohol note in the flavor, which adds a nice character to this beer. The aftertaste has a lovely lingering peach and pine resin note with the berries noted in the aroma coming into play several seconds after the swallow.

Overall, this beer is a beautiful showcase of hop flavor and hop bitterness that is further enhanced by malt sweetness and alcohol warmth. This is reminiscent of traditional West Coast-style DIPAs that I thoroughly enjoyed in the early 2000s, making it a nostalgic beverage for me. This is a world-class beer executed flawlessly and without gimmicks, using only ingredients and technique.



#3

Corylus

Pure Project Brewing

San Diego | California

Brewer's Description

Corylus is our luxurious bourbon barrel-aged imperial stout infused with a trio of adjuncts that make it an unforgettable Pure classic. The fifth batch of this velvety, full-bodied brew rested in Cutwater Bourbon barrels for 15 months, establishing a unique complexity. To take it up a notch, we added in organic toasted hazelnuts, organic Peruvian cacao and organic Brazilian coffee. Elements of each ingredient come together beautifully to create a delicious experience for the senses. Expect to be greeted with aromas of cinnamon sugar cookies, bourbon and vanilla wafers, which give way to decadent flavors of dark chocolate fudge, hazelnut gelato and inky espresso on the tongue.

Statistics

Style: Specialty Wood-Aged Beer

Style Family: Wood Beer

Availability: Limited Release

ABV: 12.6%

Served at: 50 to 50° F

Contact

Pure Project Brewing
9030 Kenamar Dr #308
San Diego, CA 92121

Tel.: (858) 252-6143
www.purebrewing.org

BREWER Q&A
Read Online



RATING: 97

by Randy Scorby

Aroma: 24 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 39 / 40

Mouthfeel: 9 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

.....
Corylus by Pure Project Brewing was judged as a Specialty Wood-Aged Beer. (2021 BJCP Category 33B)

Corylus greets you with a deep black and opaque appearance. There is no head initially, which is not unusual in a higher-alcohol, barrel-aged beer, but a swirl brings a light ring of fine bubbles around the glass, along with thick brown sheeting and heavy legs that descend slowly back into the beer. The dark cacao aroma hit me hard upon opening the bottle, and it more or less exploded when it was poured into the glass.

The flavor followed with prominent dark cacao and dark roast coffee, with a hit of vanilla as they start to fade down. The hazelnuts shine through more in the flavor, offering even more complexity alongside the dark fruit esters that exist more in the background. Medium hop bitterness emerges mid-palate and lingers into a medium-sweet finish that stops short of being cloying. The moderately low spicy alcohol is complementary and adds to the tremendous complexity of the beer. Corylus is very full-bodied with moderately low carbonation. The alcohol warming is firm but smooth throughout.

This is a tremendously well-brewed beer that made me long for a snowy day and a fire crackling in the fireplace. The richness and complexity of the aroma and flavor keep you coming back for more. When you pop the cap on this world-class brew, make sure that you have plenty of time left in the day to enjoy it.



#2

Andechser Weissbier Dunkel

Kloster Andechs

Germany

Brewer's Description

The aromatic character of this dark wheat beer is maintained by selecting the best wheat and barley malts from Bavarian malthouses and aroma hops from Hallertau. For the connoisseur's nose, the dark wheat beer from the Holy Mountain offers a harmonious interplay of fruit aromas, in particular ripe banana and pineapple, with caramel and cocoa tones in the background. Andechser Weissbier Dunkel is elegant and lively, featuring a round and soft body. A light caramel sweetness harmoniously combines with the fine hop bitterness, leaving a soft and refreshing finish.

Style: Dunkles Weissbier

Style Family: German Wheat Beer

Availability: Year-Round

ABV: 5.0%

Served at: 40 - 45° F

Contact

Kloster Andechs
Bergstr. 2
Andechs, Germany 82346

BREWER Q&A
Read Online



RATING: 98

by John C. Tull

Aroma: 24 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 39 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 19 / 20

.....
Andechser Weissbier Dunkel by Kloster Andechs was judged as Dunkles Weissbier. (2021 BJCP Category 10B)

In the tradition of German wheat beers, and the classic yeast strains used to produce them, this beer showcases a clove phenol aroma with more subtle ester notes in the background. The wheat, both light and dark varieties, in addition to pilsner malt or similar, lend a breadly and rich (but restrained) caramel quality that hints at chocolate. All of this is melded into a very satisfying and complex aroma.

The appearance is dark copper, almost brown, with a modest amount of cloudiness. A fine, tan head lingers across most of the surface and the edges of the glass. The flavor has wheat malt breadiness, hints of dark caramel, and mild clove and fruit undertones. Bitterness is very low, but detectable. The mouthfeel is medium with significant carbonation presenting a perception of a crisp finish, but that perception is overtaken by the malt presence lingering and softening that slight carbonic edginess.

Overall, this is an outstanding example of a dunkles weissbier that is very true to the classic expression of this style.



Tel.: 08152 376-252

www.andechs.de/en/monastery-brewery

#1

Acadian Skies

Batson River Brewing & Distilling

Portland | Maine

Brewer's Description

Our timeless German-style Schwarzbier showcases the style's trademark dark hue from a carefully crafted malt bill that lends notes of coffee with a gentle note of chocolate. Thanks to the traditional lager yeast, everything culminates in a clean, crisp finish, ensuring that this is a remarkably easy-drinking dark lager.

Statistics

Style: Schwarzbier

Style Family: Dark European Lager

Availability: Year-Round

ABV: 4.6%

Served at: 40° F

Contact

Batson River Brewing & Distilling

82 Hanover Street

Portland, ME 04101

Tel.: (207) 800-4680

www.batsonriver.com

RATING: 98

by Scott Birdwell

Aroma: 23 / 24

Appearance: 6 / 6

Flavor: 39 / 40

Mouthfeel: 10 / 10

Overall Impression: 20 / 20

Acadian Skies by Batson River Brewing & Distilling was judged as a Schwarzbier. (2021 BJCP Category 8B)

Acadian Skies is a very good dark lager, indeed. The beer pours a virtually opaque dark brown in the glass, bordering on the color of a porter or stout. The aroma is, unsurprisingly, on the roasty side with notes of coffee and chocolate. However, the roasted grain notes are notably more subdued than your typical porter or stout. I detected little to no hops in the aroma, which is appropriate for a black lager. This is not a hop-forward beer style. Clarity was excellent, only verified with some difficulty as this beer is super dark.

The initial flavor is borderline roasty for the style, but it never oversteps that line, in my opinion. It'll take you to the brink of a porter, but then pull back at the last minute. The finish is lager-esque, clean and dry, with just a kiss of roastiness. I found the beer to be less austere than Köstritzer schwarzbier, but not nearly as malty as, say, a Munich dunkel.

In my opinion, this is a very much under-appreciated beer style, as are most dark lagers. When you say the word "lager," most people conjure up images of golden, straw-hued beers with white heads that are crisp and smooth. Black lagers do indeed finish crisp and smooth, but even with your eyes closed, you'll know you're drinking something with a bit of roast in it. However, it's much more "coffee americano" than "espresso," and that's okay!

Overall, this is one of the best examples of a schwarzbier this judge has ever sampled. A nearly flawless execution.



BREWER Q&A

Head Brewer Dan Stampone Talks Acadian Skies

Who was responsible for this beer's recipe?

I developed this recipe shortly after joining Batson River Brewing & Distilling. As we began to define our identity as a brewery, I took a deep look inward at who we wanted to be and what we wanted as our core offerings. My passion for lagers led me to take a different approach; instead of creating a porter or stout as our year-round dark beer, I opted for a Schwarzbier that aligns with our focus on clean, balanced and approachable beers. This recipe is challenging and demands a high level of attention to all the small details.

What sets this beer apart from other examples within the style?

I'm a huge Schwarzbier fan, so I've done my research! I set out to create a flavorful dark beer that's refreshing enough for people to enjoy several pints in one sitting. I love the way this beer finishes – it's crisp and clean, really clearing out the palate. For me, that's paramount in any lager and a quality one might not expect to find in a dark lager like Acadian Skies.

What makes this beer truly World Class?

It's the finer details, though perhaps I geek out on them too much. There's so much to

look for in a beer of this style that discovering those elements is endlessly satisfying. We dial in our water profile true to style; the hops provide the right amount of bitterness to support the complex malt profile; our yeast selection creates that Goldilocks attenuation required for an addictively refreshing finish that keeps you coming back for more. When it all comes together, it's just this feeling of: "Yes, this is how we envisioned it, and we accomplished exactly that!"

What is your favorite aspect of this beer (flavor, aroma, mouthfeel, etc.)?

Hands down, it's the balance. You get all the roasted coffee notes you want from the style without overpowering the drinkability. It's like a piece of music with highs, lows and mid-tones. The complexity created by the seven different malts we utilize could easily take over, but the crisp finish provides a harmony that ties it all together.

How popular is this beer among your faithful fans?

Dark lagers are gaining momentum here in Maine. We have a growing customer base that is passionate about Acadian Skies. Of course, being given a 98 rating from you guys has helped it gain some attention! At the end of the day, it's rewarding to get it in people's hands because once they try it, they love it.



DAN STAMPONE - HEAD BREWER

THE BEST BREWERIES OF 2024



Each year, we acknowledge the breweries that collectively produced the highest-rated beers as evaluated in our Official Review. 2024 was chock-full of amazing beers and featured the highest number of World Class offerings our judges have ever had the privilege to review, many of which came from the three best breweries of the year. Read on to reveal 2024's best breweries!

How We Award

We look at the **top three highest-scoring beers** (as rated by our judging panel) for each brewery in the calendar year.

We then consider **how many of the three** place into the **100 to 96: World Class** category and the **95 to 91: Exceptional** category. For example, a brewery with two World Class beers and one Exceptional would rate

higher than a brewery with a single higher-scoring World Class beer and two Exceptional beers.

The brewery with the **most World Class beers** followed by the **most Exceptional beers** is awarded the Brewery of the Year.

If two or more breweries have the same number of World Class and Exceptional beers, then the brewery with the **highest point total** wins.

In the event of a tie, a **fourth reviewed beer** is counted as a tiebreaker.

If a fourth beer was not reviewed, we look at the highest score total among the brewery's **two top-scoring beers**.

Congratulations to this year's winners! Cheers!

PFRIEM FAMILY BREWERS

2 World Class Beer
1 Exceptional Beers
Total Score: 287

Highest-scoring beers:

pFriem Double IPA - Rated 97
Nelson Pale - Rated 96
pFriem Hazy IPA - Rated 94



pFriem Family Brewers in Hood River, Oregon is tied as the first runner-up for Brewery of the Year in 2024. pFriem is no stranger to our Brewery of the Year section, as the picturesque Oregon brewhouse achieved Brewery of the Year status in both 2018 and 2019 and was our first runner-up in 2021.

pFriem submitted a number of tremendous brews over the past year, but the brewery's top-scoring offering in 2024 was the aptly named **pFriem Double IPA**. The brewery's output spans a wide breadth of disparate beer styles, but the brewing team does remain focused on delivering styles that craft beer fans are liable to quaff with regularity - such as the omnipresent IPA and DIPa. Of course, seeing as the hazy IPA trend has slipped from its lofty heights of late, this double IPA is actually a West Coast version, which is fitting for a brewery located in the Pacific Northwest. Our judge loved this release and raved: "Overall, this beer is a beautiful showcase of hop flavor and hop bitterness that is further enhanced by malt sweetness and alcohol warmth. This is a World Class beer executed flawlessly and without gimmicks."

Following that was pFriem's second World Class beer of the year: **Nelson Pale**, a single-hop pale ale featuring only the beloved New Zealand hop varietal Nelson Sauvin (which has many similar flavor properties to Sauvignon Blanc grapes). Pale ales are often the forgotten little brother of IPAs, but many devotees still believe them to be the superior hoppy beer. Our judge agreed and called it a "near-perfect example of an American Pale Ale with New World hops" that is "supremely enjoyable."

The final high-scoring beer from pFriem was a lush, vibrant brew called **pFriem Hazy IPA**. Boasting a lovely hop bill featuring the Mosaic, Citra, El Dorado and Chinook varieties, this delightfully hazy brew wowed our judge with its striking appearance, and he called this hoppy wonder "a classic example of the hazy IPA style."

DOUBLE IPA



AMERICAN PALE ALE



HAZY IPA



PURE PROJECT BREWING

2 World Class Beer
1 Exceptional Beers
Total Score: 287

Highest-scoring beers:

Corylus – Rated 97
Rain – Rated 96
Tropical Mist – Rated 94



Pure Project Brewing in **San Diego, California** is tied for the first runner-up spot for Brewery of the Year in 2024. Pure Project was originally conceived in 2013 in Costa Rica, but the founders opted to open the brewery in Miramar after a space opened up with a prebuilt brewing system. Thank goodness they did, as, fast-forward over 10 years, and the brewery submitted some of 2024's best beers.

Pure Project delivered an intriguing array of styles to our Official Review in 2024, but the company's highest-scoring brew was **Corylus**, a rotating, limited release Specialty Wood-Aged Beer (in this case, a bourbon barrel-aged imperial stout) that is highly sought after by Pure Project's fans as well as barrel-aged beer aficionados on the West Coast – and throughout the U.S. This year, Corylus featured three terrific adjuncts: organic toasted hazelnuts, organic Peruvian cacao and organic Brazilian coffee in their base imperial stout and aged the beer for a whopping 15 months in Cutwater bourbon barrels. According to the brewery, "elements of each ingredient come together beautifully to create a delicious experience for the senses."

The brewery's second highest-scoring beer was **Rain**, a simply titled German pilsner that is far from simple. Rather, it is a near-flawless representation of a beer style that experienced massive growth in 2024, both particularly and at large: pilsners did well in the year that was and lagers in general had a banner year over the past 365 days. Rain, in particular, is an awesome modern example of a classic German style, and our judge said it "brought back many memories" of his travels to Germany while he imbibed it. High praise indeed!

Last, but far from least, from Pure Project was **Tropical Mist**, an intriguing fruit beer brewed with crushed organic Valencia oranges. Fruit beers are not the most common among craft beer tap lists these days, so it's refreshing to see one rank as one of the highest-scoring beers of the year from one 2024's best breweries.

SPECIALTY WOOD-AGED BEER



FRUIT BEER



GERMAN PILS





Congratulations to Kloster Andechs in Andechs, Germany for being named *The Beer Connoisseur's* 2024 Brewery of the Year!

2024 was one of the best years ever for our Official Review. A staggering 14 beers achieved scores of 96 or above in 2024, which tied the record for most ever in a calendar year. That means our Brewery of the Year had to produce multiple beers that achieved World Class scores of 96 or above, and monastery brewery Kloster Andechs certainly achieved that with three beers featuring scores of 98, 97 and 96, respectively. Andechs is the first European brewery to ever achieve our vaunted Brewery of the Year title, and the first abbey brewery ever featured among our top three breweries of the year. While craft beer's quality is astounding, the craftsmanship achieved by European Trappist breweries remains the gold standard among brewing traditions.

The history of brewing in the Andechs region can be traced all the way back to the 12th century, when pilgrims came to the Holy Mountain of Andechs and were served food and ale. Kloster Andechs, which is located on the grounds of the Andechs Monastery in Andechs, Germany, is home to Benedictine monks, who have been serving incredible Trappist beers since 1455. "Here in Bavaria, beer is not merely an indulgence, it is food. It is made from grain, yeast and water, just like bread." These words from Andechs Benedictine monk Willibald Mathäser (1901-1985) perfectly convey the importance of beer to Kloster Andechs and its Benedictine inhabitants – as well as the extreme



KLOSTER ANDECHS - ANDECHS, GERMANY



TOTAL SCORE: 291

3 World Class Beers

Highest-scoring beers:

Andechser Weissbier Dunkel – Rated 98

Andechser Doppelbock Dunkel – Rated 97

Andechser Weissbier Hell – Rated 96

care and focus that the monks provide to Andechs' beer brewing processes.

The Kloster Andechs monastery brewery has been combining Benedictine brewing tradition with the latest brewing technology since its founding in 1455, and the brewery's traditional brewing techniques are far more time-consuming than conventional brewing methods. However, that focus on quality over turnaround defines the brewing team's philosophy, which is in keeping with the concept of all of the monastery's enterprises: "Our tradition is being progressive, and we owe our progress to a long tradition." While the brewery has grown to become Kloster Andechs' leading enterprise over the centuries, the abbey formerly has expanded upon its monastery operations over the years and, at one point, those services included a pharmacy, locksmith, blacksmith, engineering offices, fishery, tavern operation and a bakery.

But it's the beer that everyone keeps coming back for, as well as the pristine environs that surround it, including the Kloster Andechs monastery itself, which is a stunningly ornate baroque monastery with a sparkling golden interior and an instantly recognizable exterior – and it has to be, as Kloster Andechs is home to a pilgrimage that dates back to the 12th century, making it Bavaria's oldest pilgrimage. Seeing as the United States is only approaching 250 years old as a country, there's something truly powerful about thinking about holy pilgrims visiting Kloster Andechs in the 1100s and being served the same beer – or something close to it, at least – as the beers that scored highly in our Official Review in the year 2024. That's approaching one millennium (1000 years!) later. Beer is truly the world's beverage.

Being able to sample incredibly well-brewed beers made with extreme care by Benedictine monks on a mountainside in Bavaria from the comfort of your own home is truly a miracle, and we thank Kloster Andechs for their contributions to our Official Review this year and to brewing in general. *Prost!*

Kloster Andechs
Bergstr. 2
Andechs, Germany 82346

Tel.: 08152 376-252
www.andechs.de/en/monastery-brewery

Kloster Andechs delivered three astounding beers in 2024, two of which fall under the “wheat beer” moniker, though they’re far from the Americanized versions that have long filled up store shelves (such as Blue Moon or Boulevard’s Unfiltered Wheat). The third was a top-tier Doppelbock that just so happens to be the highest-scoring Doppelbock we’ve ever reviewed in our history.

The brewery’s top-scoring beer was **Andechser Weissber Dunkel**, which is a Dunkles Weissbier – something of a rare style in the U.S. as it combines the wheatiness of an American Wheat Beer or Hefeweizen with the dark malts of a darker beer, such as a Porter or Schwarzbier. This rather unusual combination was brewed to perfection by the Benedictine monks of Kloster Andechs, as our judge was absolutely floored by the harmonious interplay between fruit aromas from the wheat (ripe banana and pineapple) and caramel and cocoa tones from the malts employed in the background. “Overall,” our judge, John C. Tull said, “this is an outstanding example of a Dunkles Weissbier that is very true to the classic expression of the style.”

The second highest-scoring beer of 2024 from Andechs was **Andechser Doppelbock Dunkel**. Doppelbock is an iconic style that is certainly synonymous with abbey brewing methods, as this beer style was actually invented by monks in the 17th century to serve as a bread replacement during Lenten fasts. As such, Kloster Andechs producing a nearly flawless representation of the style makes perfect sense, since the monks at Andechs monastery have been producing beer since the 12th century. For the brewery’s Doppelbock Dunkel, expect an unmistakable taste that’s “full-bodied, velvety and strong but with a pleasant malt aroma that’s powerful and lusty,” according to the brewery.

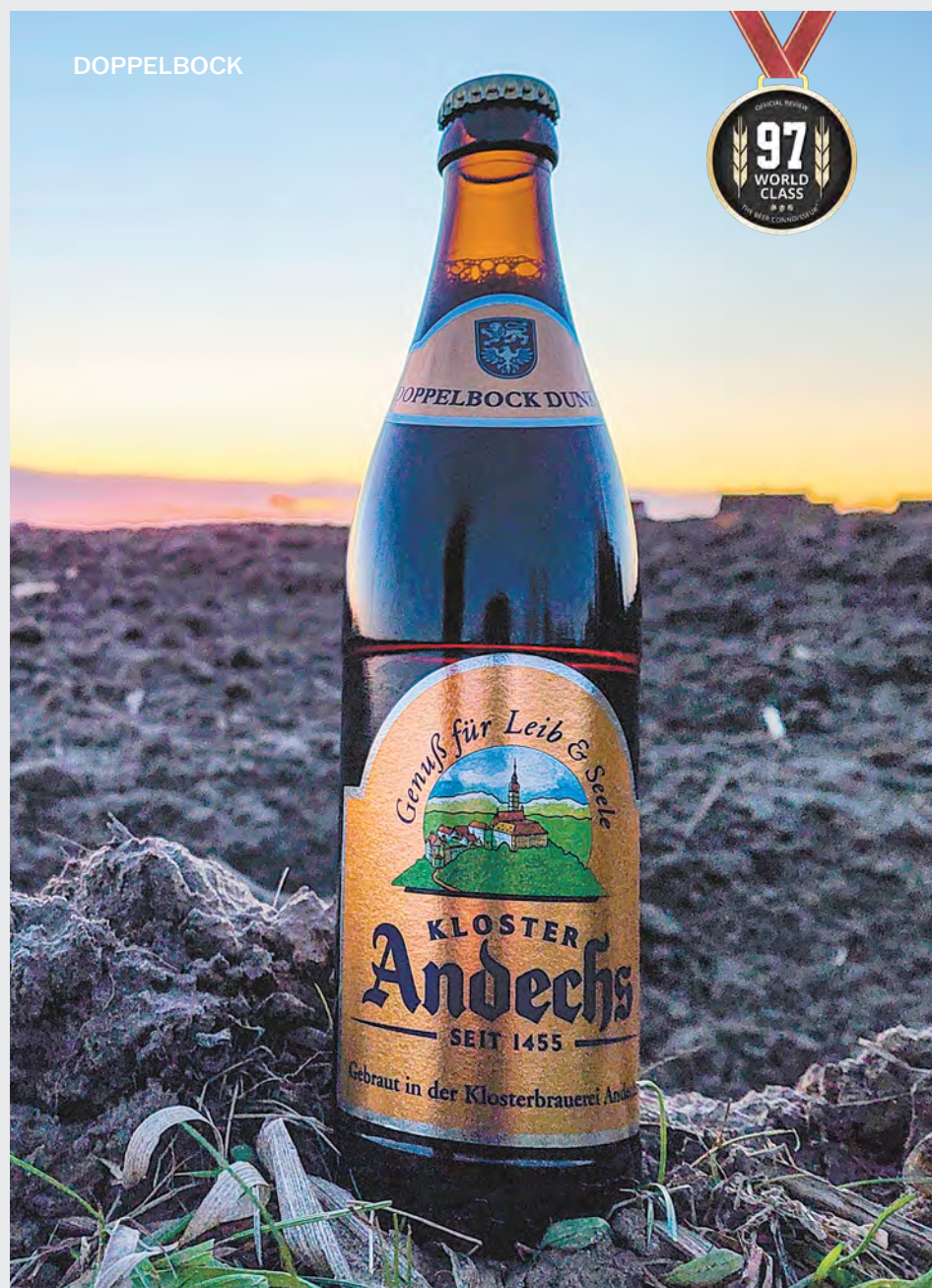
The final top-scoring beer from Kloster Andechs was an intriguing and effervescent Weissbier (aka Hefeweizen) called **Andechser Weissbier Hell**. Evincing the style’s standard bouquet of bananas, cloves and light bubblegum, the beer’s flavors followed suit, and our judge adored this refreshing, zippy drink that invites multiple bottles in a single sitting, though it was perhaps the beer’s aroma that impressed him the most: “A wonderful expression of yeast and wheat malt aromas emanate from this beer. A classic balance of banana and clove esters and phenols, respectively, is evident with a touch of black pepper in the deep background.”



DUNKLES WEISSBIER



HEFEWEIZEN / WEISSBIER



DOPPELBOCK

STORY BY: CHRIS GUEST | PHOTOS COURTESY RESPECTIVE BREWERIES

With 2025 upon us, craft beer, and the beverage industry at large, continue to grapple with changing consumer tastes as well as a hugely saturated market that's flush with all manner of delectable boozy beverages.

From the omnipresent IPA to an expanding array of thirst-quenching lagers, the beer landscape is more diverse than ever. As such, let's go on a sojourn to discover the top trending beer styles for 2025. There is sure to be something here that wets your whistle and whets your appetite for top-tier brews.

SCHWARZBIER

As has been the case for a few years now, lagers are quite the hot ticket among craft beer connoisseurs and craft beer brewers. It turns out that the most popular beer style around the world – made famous by massive megabrewers spread across multiple continents – is still a major player in the more niche craft beer market as well.

In 2025, expect lagers in the craft beer sphere to branch out and open up lager fans to more intriguing styles, such as this German dark lager with a rich, malty backbone coupled with the easy-drinking nature of a lager.

Malt flavors should be roasty yet smooth in this easy drinker. The lack of a heavy after-taste – something that is commonplace in some dark beers – means that this dark lager style is supremely quaffable, which is surely an important factor when drinking a lager.

Commercial Examples: Dark by The Alchemist, Shell by Halfway Crooks Beer, Black Lager by Frequentum Brewing Co., Black Bavarian by Sprecher Brewing Co., Goodnight Munich by Liquid Gravity Brewing Co.

CZECH LAGER

From one lager to another, Czech Lager is sure to be an up-and-coming craft style in 2025. While you are more likely to see American Lagers, German Lagers (such as Pilsners) and Mexican-style Lagers on store shelves and in craft brewery taprooms, Czech Lagers are a burgeoning style that are equally as refreshing and delicious as those more common styles.

Czech Lager is also an engaging style due to its variety, as it has four different substyles per the Beer Judge Certification Program: Czech Pale Lager, Czech Premium Pale Lager, Czech Amber Lager and Czech Dark Lager.

Each one of the styles has its own merits, but the wide range of flavors and aromas available means this style is wide open to intriguing interpretations – making it the perfect jumping-off point for craft breweries looking to experiment with lagers more generally.

Commercial Examples: Czech 10° by Human Robot, Pilsner by Von Trapp Brewing, Lena 10° by Schilling Beer Co., Czech Dark Lager by Triple Crossing Beer, 10 Degrees of Night by North Park Beer Co.

MEXICAN LAGER

This might not be the biggest news, but Mexican Lager is poised to continue its meteoric rise in

2025 after a terrific 2024. Propelled by Modelo Especial, which continues to be the number one beer in the U.S. by total sales volume – thanks to the huge consumer boycott of Bud Light – Mexican Lager is an enjoyable, easy-drinking and highly adaptable style that many craft brewers are likely to delve into in the new year.

While it may not officially be a BJCP style, drinkers know what to expect when they hear “Mexican Lager:” either an amber or golden smooth-drinking lager that pairs well with any manner of food, although tacos, burritos and quesadillas might go best with this uber-popular style.

Commercial Examples: One Of Us Will Have To Bury The Other by Burial Beer Co. and Other Half Brewing Co., Mexican Lager by Goldfinger Brewing Co., El Mago by Tree House Brewing Co., Island Time by Resident Culture Brewing, Mexican Lager by Lone Tree Brewing Co.

AMERICAN PALE ALE

American Pale Ale, alongside Steam Beer vis-à-vis the legendary Anchor Steam, might be the beer that kicked off the craft beer revolution in the U.S. thanks to the truly masterful Sierra Nevada Pale Ale. That beer's powerful (for the time) hop quotient was unheard of when it debuted in 1980, and that specific beer remains a popular and iconic craft pale ale well over 40 years after it was first brewed.

While American IPAs remain the bellwether for craft beer around the world, 2025 could be the year that American Pale Ales return to the limelight after being relegated to “second tier” for a while.

Commercial Examples: Featherweight by Cannonball Creek Brewing Co., Snow Crest by Outlaw Brewing Co., Fort Point Pale Ale by Trillium Brewing Co., Edward by Hill Farmstead Brewery, Double Nickels by Docent Brewing

BARLEYWINE

While most of this list is dedicated to clean, smooth-drinking lagers and other styles that are quite pintable, there's always room for a big, burly beer style that is worth sipping gingerly – rather than quaffing eagerly. Barleywine is one such style.

This ultra-strong and eminently rich style couples the supreme hoppiness of a Double IPA with the rich malt backbone of darker amber styles. The result is a truly sumptuous drinking experience that is surely meant to be savored rather than slammed.

Seek out a big bottle of barleywine and share it with beer-drinking friends and family for a truly memorable experience. Make it even better by nabbing multiple bottles of a specific barleywine from multiple consecutive years for a vertical tasting!

Commercial Examples: Amaro Barrel Aged Barleywine by pFriem Family Brewers, Works & Days by Cellarmaker Brewing Co., Meteora by Toppling Goliath Brewing Co., Skookies and Cream by Skookum Brewing Co., Songs from a Barn: Barleywine #1 by Tired Hands Brewing Co.

DOPPELBOCK

After a series of smooth, low-ABV lagers, it's good to get a little alcohol heat on this list!

Doppelbock is another famed German style that was originally invented by monks in Munich in the 1700s. The style has continued to be a popular one in Germany since its inception, but U.S. breweries have begun crafting their own versions of this traditional abbey style – and 2025 will likely be a banner year for craft Doppelbocks.

With a tremendously luscious malt presence – so much so that it was imbibed by monks during Lent as a replacement for food while they fasted – and a hearty alcohol quotient, this style is one that would pair beautifully as a nighttime tippie shared among friends at a bottle share or as a late-night sign-off at a family getaway in the mountains.

Commercial Examples: Execrator by Resolute Brewing Co., Activator by Wallenpaupack Brewing Co., Double Vision by Grand Teton Brewing Co., Monongalator by Brew Gentlemen, Co-Munichator by Deschutes Brewery

DARK MILD

While lagers are clearly on the upswing and 2025 just might be the “year of the lager” among craft beer-heads, don't sleep on the ultra-low-ABV session ales that hail from England, specifically something like a Dark Mild.

This dark, low-gravity ale usually sits around a 3.2% ABV, which is remarkably low for a darker beer, but as tastes change and hop fatigue grows and non-alcoholic beer continues to gain market share – and shelf space – something like a Dark Mild might be just the tonic that craft beer needs to help adapt to a changing consumer landscape.

With a roasty, light flavor and a generally mild sweetness that would pair well with a tremendous number of dishes, Dark Mild might be the dark horse hit that propels craft beer forward in 2025.

Commercial Examples: Toasty by The Brew Brothers, Nitro Mild by Surly Brewing Co., Ruby Mild by Rudgate Brewery, Brains Dark by Brains Brewery, Dark Mild by Bank Top Brewery

TABLE BEER

With non-alcoholic beers continuing to rocket up sales charts throughout 2024, expect 2025 to be a big year for that style – as well as for ultra-low-ABV beer styles such as the catch-all “table beer.”

Table beers can span a variety of colors, aromas and flavors, but the main goal of the style is to be lower in alcohol than most other styles of beer – even something as light on the palate as an English Dark Mild or Best Bitter. Notably, many modern table beers feature funky, lightly sour elements akin to farmhouse ales.

Typically, table beers sit below 3% ABV and are a descendant of “small beers,” which were drunk frequently during medieval times as water purification and sanitation was a far cry from what we see in modern times.

While this style is certainly not common on store shelves or on taproom lists, expect this unusual brew to make strides due to its versatility and the creativity with which brewers can explore something of a “blank slate” without set style parameters.

Commercial Examples: Pebble by Fox Farm Brewery, Table Beer by Hudson Valley Brewery,

à la Table (Blend #1) by Side Project Brewing, The Art of Holding Space by Keeping Together, Errday by Fonta Flora Brewery

THC BEVERAGES

While not technically beer, of course, with the legality of cannabis becoming more and more commonplace across the U.S., expect THC beverages to become a major market factor throughout the new year and into the future.

As drinkers get tired of the high prices linked to top-tier craft beers, a cheaper alternative that will still give you that “buzzed” feeling are THC drinks, which will surely begin to creep into more and more markets as cannabis usage becomes more normalized within the changing legal landscape.

Flavors will surely range from lush and tropical to sweet and berry-filled to zingy citrus and ginger, spanning a wide breadth that will appeal to all drinkers – all paired with a little dash of that unique ingredient that makes cannabis a wee bit psychoactive.

Commercial Examples: THC Iced Tea Lemonade by Cycling Frog Cannabis Co., Lemon Elderflower by BRĚZ, Blueberry Acai Cannabis Water by DELTA Cannabis Water, Lo Boy by Cann, Black Cherry Fizz by WYNK

GERMAN HELLES EXPORTBIER

Seeing as lagers are surely going to do gangbusters in 2025, let's close out the list with this slightly higher-ABV golden German lager that is also known as a Dortmunder Export or simply a Dortmunder due to the style being created in Dortmund, Germany in the 1870s.

Expect a smooth, malty profile with robust hoppiness and an enticing bitterness if you're sampling an Exportbier. Minerality and herbal hops are a notable trait in both the aroma and flavor of this style, so for those that enjoy such elements, seek out this intriguing and historically significant style.

With less emphasis on finishing hops and a fuller body than a German Pils, this brew strikes a distinctive balance. It's more bitter and noticeably drier than a Munich Helles, yet it delivers a stronger, crisper profile with less hop intensity when compared to a Czech Premium Pale Lager.

Commercial Examples: Noble Stuff by Bierstadt Lagerhaus, Export Lager by Gold Dot Beer, Export 66 by Wayfinder Beer, The Minus Times: Dortmund Export Style Lager by Foam Brewers, Dorty Work by Cloudburst Brewing

Looking Ahead to 2025

Expect 2025 to be “the year of the lager” across the board – be it among craft beer fanatics stateside or around the world – as tastes change and palates adapt to the popular trends and changing headwinds that shift year by year. While some styles might fall by the wayside as tastes change and new innovations occur, expect beer to once more be a vibrant and delightful paradise for adventurous drinkers in the new year. We hope you join us on the journey!



SCHWARZBIER



CZECH LAGER



MEXICAN LAGER



AMERICAN PALE ALE



BARLEYWINE



DOPPELBOCK



DARK MILD



TABLE BEER

When independent brewers took exception to the mass marketing of mundane beer, the result was an American revolution. By establishing a local brewery within 10 miles of 80 percent of the population, independent brewers literally conquered America.

Story by: **JONATHAN INGRAM**

In 2024, the next challenge for craft brewing became apparent: How to deal with demand that is no longer insatiable after the craft community suffered a series of body blows. First came the buyouts of established craft breweries by mega brewers that began in 2015. The pandemic followed, further denting the masses' demand for craft brews. The most recent headwinds are a cultural shift in what people drink and how they view drinking.

But I still don't get the purveyors of doom and gloom when it comes to craft.

Citing the usual checklist, economists have all kinds of statistics about the sales slowdown in beer overall and craft specifically. Competition, changing social attitudes and the generational shift from Millennials to Gen Z are the usual starting points about why packaged craft beer sales continue to decline without draft sales in taprooms or restaurants making up the loss of volume. (Draft sales are rising to pre-pandemic levels.)

Fortunately, we are not economists. Skipping the day-to-day minutiae about year-over-year declines in favor of the larger picture, craft beer's sales totaled \$29 billion in 2023 for those breweries considered independent by the Brewers Association. That's up from pre-pandemic numbers by \$3 billion. A more realistic discussion is about a craft beer marketplace that no longer thrives on increasing demand driven by new arrivals or new territories.

Yet, the extraordinary beers keep coming. Innovation continues to be sparked by the authentic pursuit of some of the world's best beer.

From more refreshing hazy IPAs, to new takes on West Coast IPAs as well as impeccable pilsners and lagers, craft brewers continue to explore their art and science by using a wide range of new methods and ingredients. The smaller, more esoteric categories like stouts, sours, wild ales and fruited beers, not to mention saisons and farmhouse styles, continue to be well subscribed in the judging at the Great American Beer Festival. Beyond that, it's surprising to learn just how easy it is to find English styles.

While there was a lot of "monkey see, monkey do" to meet demand when there seemed to be no end to it, a renewed focus on connecting to consumers is bringing craft back to its authentic roots. Authenticity can be described as a real connection to customers. Making that connection now requires a brewer to constantly build on its name and reputation, origin story, the quality of beer and innovation.

The view from here looks as if the generational shift from the Millennials to Gen Z is having the biggest influence on the challenge brewers face in generating new craft beer drinkers.

From 2000 until the pandemic, the timeline of craft's market share growth correlated directly with the arrival of Millennials at the legal drinking age. This love of all things artisanal included such DIY pursuits as homebrewing, or, say, making (then slicing) your own bacon. Check out any

crowded taproom and you'll see a predominance of the group that came of age close to the century mark, when artisanal pursuits became the acid test of cool.

The current challenge with an aging base of fans and a younger generation goes beyond an engaging taproom and good beer. Occasions are required to keep craft beer, pardon the expression, cool. And, when it comes to communicating from the shelf, look no further than New Belgium's distinctive product line and the labels on its Voodoo Ranger IPAs.

In the retail space, independent brewers, regardless of their size and who is walking the aisles, are faced with the same challenge. There's a dizzying array of choices, which include RTDs (both spirit-based and malt-based) as well as an avalanche of fermented malt beverages, hard seltzers and hard teas.

On the other hand, do we miss the good ol' days before hard seltzers began arriving in 2016 when a multitude of craft beer choices jammed the cabinets? Probably not. In place of running everything up the flagpole in as many states as possible, the smaller craft brewers now tend to pick and choose how they connect with consumers in retail sales. Microbreweries are less inclined to think of expanding to a new state as the best path to growth. (There's an indirect benefit of less out-of-date beer on the shelves.)

There are new horizons and methodologies that are having a positive influence. There's a movement to encourage minority ownership of craft breweries as well as efforts to market to minority drinkers. Mergers between smaller, independent breweries are creating new possibilities for not only sustaining brands but expanding them. Contract brewing between independents has also expanded opportunities.

Although THC drinks are not brewed, this "beyond beer" category may help the bottom line in the future at breweries with excess capacity. Currently in that gray area between accepted but illegal in half the states, marijuana use is cited as a headwind for craft beer. Those who might pursue an alternative lifestyle are choosing marijuana over alcohol, or so the theory goes. Alas, at this point, it's just a theory.

After the pandemic, no other issue has cut into the craft mystique like independent breweries selling their businesses on an eight-figure or nine-figure scale to macro brewers, which can lead to a downturn in sales. Corporate giant Heineken, for one example, reports that the once high-flying Lagunitas brand that reflected the counter-cultural mentality of founder Tony Magee has fallen precipitously from its sales peak.

In the three years after Heineken's nearly \$1 billion purchase in 2018, production at Lagunitas fell by 122,000 barrels. That was before the pandemic. From a high of just over 1 million barrels at the time of the final acquisition, the brand's most recent annual production was down by over

300,000 barrels at the end of 2023.

Is there a "deep state" conspiracy among the big brewers to minimize craft? That seems hardly likely given the investment macro brewers such as AB InBev and Kirin-Lion, in addition to Heineken, have made acquiring craft brands. Or the investment made by MolsonCoors in Blue Moon. But the faltering of major brands that have been acquired certainly has a negative impact on the perception of craft. Constellation Brands, for instance, wrote off much of its \$1 billion acquisition of Ballast Point.

Devotees may not have given up on drinking craft beer as the result of what some perceived as "selling out." But in any case, regarding craft as a life-changing force is no longer in vogue. Once regarded as a progressive movement with the inherent political overtones of changing the world, craft beer has become a lifestyle movement, not necessarily a belief system.

When the sales of Anchor Steam flagged, the seemingly inevitable nadir arrived when owner Sapporo, Japan's oldest brewer, elected to close Anchor Brewing last year, the place on San Francisco's Potrero Hill that christened the craft movement in the 1960s.

Craft's overall staying power is exemplified by three of the top 25 U.S. beer producers. Although now owned by Kirin-Lion, which technically does not make them "craft" by the Brewers Association criteria, the New Belgium and Bell's brands are in the black for 2024. Two of the seven other producers with increased sales are craft stalwart Sierra Nevada and Athletic, the leader in non-alcohol beer sales. Boston Beer, Yuengling, Artisanal Brewing, Firestone Walker and CANarchy, the other craft brands in the Top 25, show declining sales for 2024.

Where is evidence of craft's staying power? Recent data shows an improvement when it comes to declining beer sales. Plus, many producers have used pricing to sustain the bottom line, which indicates customer loyalty among craft drinkers, who continue to pay premium prices.

Attitudes toward drinking itself are changing in the form of "Dry January" and "Sober October" along with many other emerging trends driven, in part, by younger Americans. Fortunately, led by Athletic, which grew by 70 percent in 2024, non-alcoholic craft beer is the fastest-growing segment by far. Athletic's marketing data shows that most of its customers also drink traditional beer. The key to its success is a highly innovative and technically challenging brewing process.

What about the media? Given that we are in the media business, it would not behoove us to cite a media conspiracy. It's just that craft is no longer regarded as a cultural phenomenon when it comes to mainstream media – although Athletic's story as well as its non-alcoholic beer come close these days.

Instead, craft beer is here to stay – simply as a regular and valued member of the neighborhood.



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